Julia A. Richar

From

Theresa

THE

BIBLE AND THE CLOSET:

OR

HOW WE MAY READ THE SCRIPTURES WITH THE MOST SPIRITUAL PROFIT,

BY REV. THOMAS WATSON;

AND

SECRET PRAYER SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED,

BY REV. SAMUEL LEE;

Ministers Ejected in 1662.

EDITED BY

JOHN OVERTON CHOULES,

WITH A RECOMMENDATORY LETTER FROM

REV. E. N. KIRK.

BOSTON:

GOULD, KENDALL & LINCOLN,

59 Washington Street.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1844,
By GOULD, KENDALL & LINCOLN,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

PREFACE.

It is a proper ground for regret, that a people who owe their origin, social habits, religious privileges and national character, to the Puritans and Non-conformists of England, should manifest so little interest and curiosity, in regard to the names, persons, manners, sufferings, and writings, of their ancestry, as appears to be the case at present in the United States. The members of the churches properly attached to the doctrines of the Non-conformists, have not that lively impression of gratitude and obligation to the struggles of the Puritans, which should characterize men who enjoy inestimable blessings, purchased by cruel bonds, far exilements, and bloody death. The young are almost ignorant of the church history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and when they do hear of the Puritans, it is probably from some infidel novelist or historian, who describes them as uncouth, sour, ignorant fanatics, or from the bigoted representations of half-popish ecclesiastics, who seem to regard amputation from Rome as a severe affliction.

The ordinations of the ministers in Congregational, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches usually take place without any reference to the distinctive principles for which our fathers contended, and which are now gainsayed and ridiculed by men who call Hampden and Pym traitors, Archbishop Laud a saint, and Charles I. a blessed martyr. The con-

sequence is, that our young people suppose these things to be unimportant, and while they hear them assailed by fashionable and popular preachers, and no refutation offered, they naturally fear that we have a poor cause. It is become a common thing with a certain clique of the press and pulpit, to deny piety, sound theology and literature to the Non-conformists; and it is high time that the incomparable works of these men be made known to our churches, and they will appear an ample testimonial to their worth. It is probable that history cannot afford in any age or country a body of clergymen equal in virtue, talent, and aptness to teach, with that ejected from the Church of England by the act of uniformity passed by Charles, in 1662. The world was called to witness the reality of religious principle, when more than two thousand ministers, described by John Locke as "worthy, learned, pious, orthodox divines," sacrificed their all, rather than injure their consciences and desert the cause of civil and religious liberty. The celebrated Harvey observes: "I esteem the Puritans as some of the most zealous Christians that ever appeared in our land, to settle faith on its proper basis—the meritorious righteousness of Christ; to deduce obedience from its true origin—the love of God shed abroad in the heart; to search the conscience and convince the judgment; to awaken the lethargic and comfort the afflicted soul, with a thorough knowledge joined to a masterly application of the divine word. These are real excellences: these entered into the preaching; these, if we examine impartially, are to be found in the wri-

tings of the Puritans." Whitfield bears the same testimony: "The Puritans of the last century, burning and shining lights, wrote and preached after they were cast out of the church, as men having authority; a peculiar unction attends their writings to this day; and for these thirty years past I have remarked that the more true and vital religion hath revived at home and abroad, the more the good old puritanical writings have been called for."

Brown of Haddington, in his general history, has the following remarks: "Never perhaps, since the apostolic age, was the Christian system better understood than by the British divines under Cromwell." "The Puritans," says Robert Hall, "are unquestionably the safest of all uninspired guides. The masculine sense, the profound learning, the rich and unequalled unction of the fathers of the modern church, exert a powerful influence on the mind, and greatly contribute to form and mature the characters of men."

Mr. Erskine very finely observes: "This class of men, in respect of character and services, are universally venerated. By their sufferings and labors they rescued the key of knowledge from the unworthy hands in which it had long lain rusted, and been misused, and generously left it as a rich inheritance to all coming generations. They speak with the solemn dignity of martyrs; deep and solemn seriousness is the common character of them all. They seem to have felt much; religion was not allowed to remain an unused theory in their heads; they were forced to live upon it as their

food; to live upon it as their only strength and comfort; hence their thoughts are never given us as abstract views. These venerable worthies do not merely give us ideas, but ideas colored by the deep affections. This gives us a great interest in their writings. They are real men, and not books we are conversing with. These were the great men of England; they were indeed a noble army."

It is proposed to publish, in uniform style, and in close succession, a selection of the writings of the Puritans and Non-conformists, who were ejected from the Church of England in 1662. Let it appear if they were not of a kindred spirit to those martyrs recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and of whom the Spirit of God testifies that they were men "of whom the world was not worthy." Every volume will be complete in itself, and it is designed to render the publication not only profitable to the private Christian as a guide to his devotions, but useful to the clergy, by introducing them to works which, from their exceeding scarceness, can hardly be procured in England. As far as practicable, there will be biographical notices of the authors affixed to each reprint; for to suffer the memory of such men to die, is injurious to posterity. The reader is earnestly entreated to consult the texts which are so freely quoted; he will find it a delightful task, and with God's blessing upon it he will become "mighty in the Scriptures."

JNO. OVERTON CHOULES.

May, 1842.

RECOMMENDATORY LETTER

FROM THE

REV. E. N. KIRK.

University Place, New York.

My Dear Brother Choules:

Your proposal to republish the "Morning Lectures," in detached portions and a cheap form, I may say delights me. This class of publications may supply the most striking deficiency in the practical religious literature of our day. It was the defect of our fathers, that they thought efficiently without efficient action. It is ours, that action, though rarely excessive, is yet generally disproportioned to thought. The problem of the age is, to unite profound biblical thought with intense and judicious action. Now it is true that we cannot think by proxy; but it is also true, in every department of knowledge, that others

can furnish us the richest material of thought, and enable us, as it were, almost to commence where they left off. There are rich veins of scriptural illustration and of religious sentiment, buried in the tomes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is a good service to the church of the nineteenth century to reöpen those mines. Our neophytes need it, and our ministerial corps may find models which can be most profitably imitated in some points. The American pulpit is probably the most efficient in the world, in the great work of conversion. But we fail just where the Mantons, the Howes, the Owens, the Godwins excelled: in "edifying the body of Christ." May the Master approve and bless your work.

Your fellow-servant,

EDW. N. KIRK.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Rev. Thomas Watson, A. M., of Emanuel College, Cambridge, and Minister of St. Stephen's Church, Walbrook.

Of the early life of Mr. Watson, there are not many traces. It is said that he was a hard student. Richard Baxter, in his own history, edited by Sylvester, says, p. 95, part 3: "Mr. Watson is so well known for his ability and piety, that I need not describe him." There is an interesting anecdote respecting his pulpit performances. Once on a public lecture, in London, the learned Bishop Richardson came in to hear him, and

was much pleased with the sermon, and especially with the prayer after it; so that he called on him at his house, to return him thanks and ask for a copy of it. "Alas," said Mr. Watson, "that is what I cannot give, for I do not use to pen my prayers 't was not a studied theory, but uttered as God enabled me, from the abundance of my heart and affections." The good Bishop was surprised that any man could pray in that manner extempore. Mr. Watson, after his ejectment, continued to preach in London, as Providence opened a door.

It is worthy of note that he was one of the party arrested by the Rump parliament, on the charge of treason, for assisting the royal cause in Scotland. Mr. Christopher Love was beheaded on Tower hill. Mr. Jenkin, the famous commentator on Jude, died in prison. Mr. Watson deserved a better treat-

ment from Charles than he received. This fact is only a solitary one, while a mass may be collected, to prove that the overturn of the monarchy was not the work of Puritan ministers alone—very many of whom were attached to the royal family, and bitterly regretted the death of Charles; and a remonstrance signed by sixty-nine of the leading ministers was addressed to Cromwell, to prevent that tragedy. (See Bennett's Memorial, p. 227.) In the admirable collection of "Farewell Sermons," there are three by Mr. Watson, in which he exemplifies much of the spirit of the gospel, in recommending love to enemies. In one of the discourses he insists largely on "the ardent affections of a right gospel minister towards his people."

Mr. Watson is best known at the present day by his folio volume of one hundred and

seventy-six sermons on the Assembly's Catechism, recommended by Dr. Bates, Mr. Howe and others. His popularity as a preacher kept him constantly engaged. At length nature gave way, and he retired into Essex, and there was found dead in his closet at prayer.

HOW WE MAY READ THE SCRIPTURES WITH MOST SPIRITUAL PROFIT.

"And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law and these Statutes, to do them."—*Deut.* xvii. 19.

WHAT Cicero said of Aristotle's politics, may not unfitly be said of this book of Deuteronomy, it is full of golden eloquence. In this chapter, God instructs the Jews about setting a king over them, and there are two things specified, as to his *election*, and his *religion*.

1. His election, verse 15. "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose." Good reason that God should have the choice of their king, since "by him kings reign." Prov. viii. 15.

2. His religion, verse 18. "When he sitteth on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priest." Here

was a good beginning of a king's reign; the first thing he did after he sat upon the throne, was to copy out the word of God in a book. And in the text, "It shall be with him, and he shall read therein, all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law and these Statutes, to do them." "It shall be with him." The Book of the Law shall be his *Vade Mecum*, or daily companion. Charles the Great used to set his crown upon the Bible. Indeed the Bible is the best support of government. "And he shall read therein." It is not below the majesty of a prince to peruse the oracles of Heaven; in them are comprised sacred apothegms. Prov. viii. 6: "I will speak of excellent things." In the Septuagint it is "grave things," in the Hebrew, "princely things," such as are fit for a God to speak and a king to read. Nor must the king only read the Book of the Law at his first instalment into his kingdom, but he "shall read in it all the days of his life." He must not leave off reading, till he left off reigning. And the reasons why he must be conversant in the law of God, are in the subsequent words: 1. "That he may

learn to fear the Lord his God." Reading of the word is the best means to usher in the fear of the Lord. 2. "That he may keep all the words of this Law, to do them." 3. "That he may prolong his days in his kingdom."

I shall now confine myself to these words, "He shall read in it all the days of his life;" i. e. in the Book of the Law.

The Holy Scripture is, as Austin saith, a golden epistle sent to us from God. This is to be read diligently; ignorance of Scripture is the mother of error, not of devotion. Matt. xxii. 29: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." We are commanded to "search the Scriptures." John v. 39. The Greek word signifies to search as for a vein of silver. How diligently does a child read over his father's will and testament! and a citizen peruse his charter! With the like diligence should we read God's word, which is our Magna Charta for Heaven. It is a mercy that the Bible is not prohibited. Trajan the emperor forbade the Jews to read in the Book of the Law. Let us inquire at this sacred oracle. Apollos was "mighty in the Scriptures." Acts xviii. 24. Melancthon,

when he was young, sucked the sincere milk of the word. Alphonsus, King of Arragon, read over the Bible fourteen times. That Roman Lady, Cecilia, had by much reading of the word, made her heart the Library of Christ, as Jerome relates. Were the Scriptures confined to the original tongues, many would plead excuse for not reading; but when the sword of the Spirit is unsheathed, and the word is made plain to us by being translated, what should hinder us from a diligent search into these holy mysteries?

Adam was forbidden upon pain of death to taste of the tree of knowledge. Gen. ii. 17: "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." But there is no danger of touching this tree of Holy Scripture; if we do *not* eat of *this* tree of knowledge we shall surely die. What will become of them who are strangers to the Scriptures? Hosea viii. 12: "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." Many lay aside the Scriptures as rusty armor. Jer. viii. 9. "They are better read in romances than in Paul; they spend many hours between the comb and the glass, but their eyes begin to be sore

when they look at a Bible. The very Turks will rise up in judgment against these Christians. They reverence the Books of Moses; and if they find but a leaf whereon any thing of the Pentateuch is written, they take it up and kiss it. They who slight the word written, slight God himself, whose stamp it bears. To slight the king's edict is an affront offered to the person of the king. They who reject and vilify the Scriptures are in a state of condemnation. Prov. xiii. 13: "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed." Nor is it enough to read the word of God, but it should be our care to get some spiritual emolument and profit by it, that our souls may be nourished up in the words of faith. 1 Tim. iv. 6. Why else was the Scripture written but that it might profit us? God did not give us his word only as a landscape to look upon, but he delivered it as a father delivers a stock of money to his son to improve. 'T is sad not to profit by the word, to be like the body in a consumption, that does not thrive. Men would be loath to trade and get no profit. The grand question I am to speak to, is this. How we may read the Scriptures with

most spiritual profit. In answering this question, I shall lay down several rules or directions about the reading of Scripture.

I. If you would profit by reading, remove those things that will hinder your profiting. That the body may thrive, obstructions must be removed. There are three obstructions must be removed, if you would profit by Scripture. 1. Remove the love of every sin. Let a physician prescribe ever so good recipes, if the patient takes poison it will hinder the virtue and operation of the physic. The Scripture prescribes excellent recipes, but sin lived in, poisons all. The body cannot thrive in a fever, nor can the soul under the feverish heat of lust. Plato calls the love of sin *magnus dæmon*, a great devil. As the rose is destroyed by the canker which breeds in it, so are the souls of men by those sins in which they indulge. 2. Take heed of those thorns which will choke the word read. These thorns our Saviour expounds to be the cares of this world. Matt. xiii. 22. By "*cares*" is meant *covetousness*. A covetous man hath such diversity of secular employment that he can scarce find time to read, or if he doth, what solecisms doth he commit

in reading? While his eye is upon the Bible, his heart is upon the world; it is not the writings of the Apostles he is so much taken up with, as the writing in his account books. Is this man like to profit? You may as soon extract oil and syrup out of a flint, as he any real benefit out of Scripture. 3. Take heed of jesting with Scripture; this is playing with fire. Some cannot be merry unless they make bold with God; when they are sad, they bring forth the Scripture as their harp to drive away the evil spirit, as that drunkard who having emptied his cups, calls to his fellows, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." In the fear of God beware of this. King Edward IV. would not endure to have his crown jested with, but caused him to be executed who said *he would make his son heir to the Crown*, meaning the sign of the Crown on his tavern. Much less will God endure to have his word jested with. Eusebius relates of one who took a piece of Scripture to jest with, God struck him with frenzy. The Lord may justly give over such persons to a *reprobate mind*. Rom. i. 28.

II. If you would profit, prepare your

hearts to the reading of the word; the heart is an instrument needs putting in tune. 1 Sam. vii. 3: "Prepare your hearts to the Lord." The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it indecent to be too hasty or rash in the service of their supposed deities. This preparation for reading consists in two things:

1. In summoning our thoughts together to attend to that solemn work we are going about. The thoughts are stragglers, therefore rally them together. 2. In purging out those unclean affections which do indispose us to reading. Before we come to the water of life, let us cast away the poison of impure affections. Many come rashly to the reading of the word, and no wonder if they come without preparation, they go away without profit.

III. Read the Scriptures with reverence; think every line you read, God is speaking to you. The ark wherein the law was put, was overlaid with pure gold, and was carried on bars, that the Levites might not touch it. Ex. xxv. Why was this but to breed in the people reverence to the law? When Ehud told Eglon he had a message to him

from God, he arose from his throne. Judges iii. 20. The word written is a message from Jehovah; with what veneration should we receive it.

IV. Read the books of Scripture in order. Though occurrences may sometimes divert our method, yet, for a *constant course*, it is best to observe an order in reading. Order is a help to memory. We do not begin to read a friend's letter in the middle.

V. Get a right understanding of Scripture. Psalm cxix. 73: "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily untied, yet things essential to salvation the Holy Ghost hath plainly pointed out to us. The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures is the first step to profit. In the Law, Aaron was first to light the lamps, and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must be first lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing scriptures, by conferring with others, by using the best annotators. Without knowledge the Scripture is a *sealed book;* every line is too high for us; and if the word

shoot above our head, it can never hit our heart.

VI. Read the word with seriousness. I one go over the Scripture cursorily, says Erasmus, there is little good to be got by it; but if he be serious in reading it, it is the savor of life; and well may we be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. Deut. xxxii. 47: "It is not a vain thing for you; it is your life." If a letter were to be broken open and read, wherein a man's whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it. In the Scripture our salvation is concerned; it treats of the love of Christ, a serious subject. Christ hath loved mankind more than the angels that fell. Heb. ii. 7. The loadstone, indifferent to gold and pearl, draws the iron to it; thus Christ passed by the angels, who were of more noble extraction, and drew mankind to him. Christ loved us more than his own life; nay, though we had a hand in his death, yet that he should not leave us out of his will. This is a love that *passeth knowledge;* who can read this without seriousness? The Scripture speaks of

the mystery of faith, the eternal recompenses, and the paucity of them that shall be saved. Matt. xx. 16: "Few chosen." One saith the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring; there are but (comparatively) few names in the Book of Life. The Scripture speaks of striving for heaven as in an agony. Luke xiii. 24. It cautions us of falling short of the promised rest. Heb. iv. 1. It describes the horrors of the infernal torments, the worm, and the fire. Mark ix. 44. Who can read this and not be serious? Some have light, feathery, spirits; they run over the most weighty truths in haste, (like Israel who eat the Passover in haste,) and they are not benefited by the word. Read with a solemn, composed spirit. Seriousness is the Christian's ballast, which keeps him from being overturned with vanity.

VII. Labor to remember what you read. Satan would steal the word out of our mind; not that he intends to make use of it himself, but lest we should make use of it. The memory should be like the chest in the ark, where the ark was put. Psalm cxix. 52: "I remembered thy judgments of old."

Jerome speaks of that religious lady, Paula, that she had most of the Scriptures by heart; we are bid to have "the word dwell in us." Col. iii. 16. The word is a jewel; it adorns the hidden man, and shall we not remember it? If the word stays not in the memory, it cannot profit. Some can better remember a piece of news than a line of Scripture; their memories are like those ponds where the frogs live, but the fish die.

VIII. Meditate upon what you read. Psalm cxix. 15: "I will meditate in thy precepts." The Hebrew word to meditate, signifies to be *intense* in the mind. In meditation there must be a fixing of the thoughts upon the object. Luke ii. 19: "Mary pondered those things." Meditation is the concoction of Scripture; reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart; reading and meditation, like Castor and Pollux, must appear together. Meditation without reading is erroneous; reading without meditation is barren. The bee sucks the flower, and then works it into the hive, and so turns it into honey; by reading we suck the flower of the word, by meditation we work it into the hive of our mind, and so

it turns to profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection. Psalm xxxix. 3: "While I was musing the fire burned." The reason we come away so cold from reading the word, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

IX. Come to the reading of Scripture with *humble hearts;* acknowledge how unworthy you are that God should reveal himself in his word to you. God's secrets are with the humble. Pride is an enemy to profiting. It has been said that the ground on which the peacock sits is barren; that heart where pride sits is *really barren.* An arrogant person disdains the counsels of the word, and hates the reproofs: is he likely to profit? James iv. 6: "God giveth grace to the humble." The most eminent saints have been of low stature in their own eyes; like the sun at the zenith, they showed least when they were at the highest. David had "more understanding than all his teachers." Psalm cxix. 99: but how humble he was. Psalm xxii. 6: "I am a worm and no man."

X. Give credence to the word written; believe it to be of God; see the name of

God in every line. The Romans, that they might gain credit to their laws, reported that they were inspired by the gods at Rome. Believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired. 2 Tim. iii. 16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, the resurrection? Whence should the Scriptures come, if not from God? 1. Sinners could not be the authors of Scripture; would they indite such holy lines, or inveigh so fiercely against the sins which they love? 2. Saints could not be the authors of Scripture; how could it stand with their sanctity to counterfeit God's name, and put "thus saith the Lord," to a book of their own devising? 3. Angels could not be the authors of Scripture. What angel in heaven durst personate God, and say, "I am the Lord?" Believe the pedigree of Scripture to be sacred, and to come from the Father of light. The antiquity of Scripture speaks its divinity. No human history extant reaches farther than Noah's flood; but the Scripture treats of things before time. Beside, the majesty, profundity, purity and harmony of

Scripture, show it could be breathed from none but God himself. Add to this the *efficacy* the written word hath upon men's consciences; by reading Scripture they have been turned into other men, as may be instanced in Austin, Junius, and others. If you should set a seal upon a piece of marble, and it should leave a print behind, you would say there was a strange virtue in that seal; so that, when the written word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart, it argues it to be of divine authority. If you would profit by the word, you must believe it to be of God. Some skeptics question the verity of Scripture; though they have the articles of religion in their creed, yet not in their belief. Unbelief enervates the virtue of the word and makes it abortive; who will obey truths he does not believe? Heb. iv. 2: "The word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith."

XI. Highly prize the Scriptures. Psalm cxix. 72: "The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver." Can he make a proficiency in any art who doth slight and depreciate it? Prize this book of God above all other books. Gregory calls

the Bible the heart and soul of God. The Rabbies say that there is a mountain of sense upon every point and tittle of Scripture. Psalm xix. 7: "The law of the Lord is perfect." The Scripture is the library of the Holy Ghost; it is a code of divine knowledge, an exact model, and platform of religion. The Scripture contains in it the *Credenda*, the things which we are to believe, and the *Agenda*, the things which we are to practise; it is able to make us wise unto salvation. 2 Tim. iii. 15. The Scripture is the standard of truth, the judge of controversy; it is the pole star to direct us to heaven. The Scripture is the compass by which the rudder of our will is to be steered; it is the field in which Christ, the pearl of price, is hid; it is a rock of diamond; it is a sacred Collyrium, or eye-salve; it mends their eyes who look upon it; it is a spiritual optic glass, in which the glory of God is resplendent; it is the panacea, or universal medicine for the soul. The leaves of Scripture are like "the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations." Rev. xxii. 2. The Scripture is the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by

"the word of truth?" James i. 18. How does he grow but by "the sincere milk of the word?" 1 Peter ii. 2. The word written is the book out of which our evidences for heaven are fetched; it is the sea-mark which shows us the rocks of sin; it is the antidote against error and apostasy; the two-edged sword which wounds the old serpent. It is our bulwark to withstand the force of lust, like the Capitol at Rome, which was a place of strength and ammunition. The Scripture is the tower of David, whereon the shields of our faith hang. Take away the word, and you deprive us o the sun, said Luther. The word written is above an angelical embassy, or a voice from heaven. 2 Peter i. 18: "This voice which came from heaven we heard; we have also a more sure word." If Cæsar so valued his Commentaries, that in preserving them he lost his purple robe, how should we estimate the sacred oracles of God? Job xxiii. 12: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." King Edward VI., on the day of his coronation, had presented before him three swords, signifying that he was monarch of three

kingdoms. The King said there was one sword wanting; being asked what that was, he answered, "the Holy Bible, which is the sword of the spirit, and is to be preferred before all these ensigns of royalty." Robert, King of Sicily, did so prize God's word, that, speaking to his friend Petrarch, he said, "I protest the Scriptures are dearer to me than my kingdom, and if I must be deprived of one of them, I had rather lose my diadem than the Scriptures."

XII. Get an ardent love to the word. Prizing relates to the judgment, love to the affections. Psalm cxix. 159: "Consider how I love thy precepts." He is likely to grow rich who delights in his trade; a lover of learning will be a scholar. Austin tells us before his conversion he took no pleasure in the Scriptures, but afterwards they were his delights. David thought the word sweeter than the honey which drops from the comb. Thomas à Kempis used to say he found no content but in a corner, with the book of God in his hand. Did Alphonsus, King of Sicily, recover of a fit of sickness from the great pleasure he took in reading Quintus Curtius? What infinite pleasure

should we take in reading the book of life! There is enough in the word to breed holy complacency and delight; it is a specimen and demonstration of God's holy love to us. The Spirit is God's love token; the word his love letter; how doth one rejoice to read over his friend's letter! The word written is a divine treasury, or store-house; in it is scattered truth as pearls, to adorn the inner man of the heart. The word written is the true manna, which hath all sorts of sweet taste in it; it is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to them of a heavy heart. I have read of an ancient Rabbi, who, in a great concourse of people, made proclamation of a sovereign cordial he had to sell; many resorting to him and asking him to show it, *he opened the Bible*, and directed them to several places of comfort in it. Holy David drank of this cordial; Psalm cxix. 50: "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me." Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden; every line in it is a fragrant flower, which we should wear not in our bosom but in our heart.

Delight in the word causeth profit: and we must not only love the *comforts* of the

word, but the *reproofs*. Myrrh is bitter to the palate, but good for the stomach.

XIII. Come to the reading of the word with honest hearts. Christ speaks of the "honest heart." Luke viii. 15.

What is it to read the word with an honest heart?

1. To come with a heart willing to know the whole counsel of God. A good heart would not have any truth concealed, but saith as Job: "What I see not, teach thou me." When men pick and choose in religion, they will do some things the word enjoins them, but not others; these are unsound hearts, and are not benefited by holy writ. These are like a patient, who having a bitter pill prescribed, and a julep, he will take the julep, but refuseth the pill.

2. To read the word with an honest heart is to read that we may be made better by it. The word is the medium and method of sanctification, and we come to it not only to illuminate but to consecrate us. John xvii. 17: "Sanctify them through thy truth." Some go to the Bible as one goes to the garden to pick flowers, i. e. fine notions. Austin confesseth that before his conversion

he went to hear Ambrose, more for the elegancy of speech and quaintness of notion, than the spirituality of the matter. This is like a woman that paints her face, but neglects her health. But this is to have an honest heart, when we come to the Scriptures as Naaman to the waters of Jordan, to be healed of our leprosy. "O," saith the soul, "that the sword of the spirit may pierce the rock of my heart; that this blessed word may have such a virtue in it as the water of jealousy, to kill and make fruitful, that it may kill my sin, and make me fruitful in grace." Numb. v. 27.

XIV. Learn to apply Scripture; take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think thus: God means my sins; when it presseth any duty, God intends me in this. Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good unless it be applied. The saints of old took the word as if it had been spoken to them by name. When king Josiah heard the threatening which was

written in the book of God, he applied it to himself; he "rent his clothes and humbled his soul before the Lord." 2 Kings xxii. 11.

XV. Observe the preceptive part of the word, as well as the promissory. The precepts carry duty in them, like the veins which carry the blood; the promises carry comfort, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the precepts to direct you, the promises to comfort you. Such as cast their eye on the promise, with a neglect of the command, are not edified by Scripture; they look more after comfort than duty. They mistake their comforts, as Apollo embraced the laurel tree instead of Daphne. The body may be swelled with wind as well as flesh; a man may be filled with false comfort, as well as that which is genuine and real.

XVI. Let your thoughts dwell upon the most material passages of Scripture. The bee fastens on those flowers where she may suck most sweetness. Though the whole contexture of Scripture is excellent, yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more quick and pungent. Reading the names of the tribes, or the

genealogies of the patriarchs, is not of the same importance as faith and the new creature. Mind the "great things of the law." Hosea viii. 12. They who read only to satisfy their curiosity, do rather busy than profit themselves. The searching too far into Christ's *temporal reign*, has weakened his *spiritual reign* in some men's hearts.

XVII. Compare yourselves with the word. See how the Scripture and your hearts agree; how your dial goes with this sun. Are your hearts, as it were, a transcript and counterpart of Scripture? Is the word copied out into your hearts? The word calls for humility; are you not only *humbled*, but *humble?* The word calls for regeneration: John iii. 7; have you a change of heart? Not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual? Is there such a change wrought in you, as if another soul did live in the same body? 1 Cor. vi. 11: "Such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are sanctified." The word calls for love to the saints; 1 Peter i. 22. Do you love grace where you see it? Do you love grace in a poor man as well as in a rich? A son loves to see his father's picture, though hung in a mean

frame. Do you love grace though mixed with some failings, as we love gold though it be in the ore? The bringing the rule of the word and our hearts together, to see how they agree, would prove very advantageous to us. Hereby we come to know the true complexion and state of our souls, and see what evidences and certificates we have for heaven.

XVIII. Take *special notice* of those Scriptures which speak to your *particular case.* Were a consumptive person to read Galen or Hippocrates, he would chiefly observe what they said about a consumption. Great regard is to be had to those paragraphs of Scripture which are most apposite to one's present case.

I shall notice three cases: 1. Affliction. 2. Desertion. 3. Sin.

1. Affliction. Hath God made your chain heavy? Consult these Scriptures. Heb. xii. 7: "If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons." Isaiah xxvii. 9: "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." John xvi. 20: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." 2 Cor. iv. 17: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for

us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The limner lays his gold upon dark colors; God first lays the dark color of affliction, and then the golden color of glory.

2. Desertion. Are your spiritual comforts eclipsed? See Isaiah liv. 8: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." The sun may hide itself in a cloud, but it is not out of the firmament; God may hide his face, but he is not out of the covenant. Isaiah lvii. 16: "I will not be always wroth, for the spirits should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." God is like the musician; he will not stretch the strings of his lute too hard, lest they break. Psalm xcvii. 11: "Light is sown for the righteous." A saint's comfort may be hid as seed under the clods, but at last it will spring up into a harvest of joy.

3. Sin. 1. Are you drawn away with lust? Read Gal. v. 24; James i. 15; 1 Peter ii. 11: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Lust kills with embracing. Prov. vii. 10, 22, 23; Prov. xxii. 14: "Go to the waters of the sanctuary to quench the fire of lust."

2. Are you under the power of unbelief? Read Isaiah xxvi. 3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." Mr. Boltor speaks of a distressed soul who found much comfort from this Scripture, on his sick bed. 2 Samuel xxii. 31: "The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all that trust in him." John iii. 15: "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish." Unbelief is a God-affronting sin. 1 John v. 10: "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar." It is a soul-murdering sin. John iii. 36: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Thus, in reading, observe those Scriptures which do touch upon your *particular* case. Although all the Bible must be read, yet those texts which point most directly to your condition, be sure to put a special star upon.

XIX. Take special notice of the examples in Scripture; make the examples of others living sermons to you.

1. Observe the examples of God's judgments upon sinners. They have been hanged up in chains, as a terror. How severely

hath God punished proud men! Nebuchadnezzar was turned to eat grass; Herod eat up with vermin. How hath God plagued idolaters! Numbers xxv. 3, 4, 9; 1 Kings xiv. 9, 10. What a swift witness hath he been against liars! Acts v. 5, 10. These examples are set up as sea-marks to avoid. 1 Cor. x. 11; Jude 7.

2. Observe the examples of God's mercy to saints. Jeremiah was preserved in the dungeon; the three children in the furnace; Daniel in the lion's den. These examples are props to faith, spurs to holiness.

XX. Leave not off reading in the Bible, till you find your hearts warmed. Psalm cxix. 93: "I will never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me." Read the word not only as a history, but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only *inform* you, but *inflame* you. Jer. xxiii. 29: "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord." Go not from the word till you can say as those disciples; Luke xxiv. 32: "Did not our hearts burn within us?"

XXI. Set upon the practice of what you read. Psalm cxix. 66: "I have done thy commandments." A student in physic does

not satisfy himself to read over a system, or body of physic, but he falls upon its practice. The life blood of religion lies in the practical part. So in the text: "He shall read in the book of the law all the days of his life, that he may learn to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them." Christians should be walking Bibles. Xenophon said many read the laws of Lycurgus, but few observed them. The word written is not only a rule of knowledge, but a rule of obedience; it is not only to mend our sight but to mend our pace. David calls God's word a "lamp to his feet." Psalm cxix. 105. It was not only a light to his eyes to see by, but to his feet to walk by; by practice we trade the talent of knowledge, and turn it to profit. This is a blessed reading of the Scriptures, when we fly from the sins which the word forbids, and espouse the duties which the word commands. Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.

XXII. Make use of Christ's prophetical office. He is the lion of the tribe of Judah, to whom it is given to open the book of God, and loose the seals thereof. Rev. v. 5.

Christ doth so teach, as he doth quicken. John viii. 12. The philosopher saith, light and heat increase together; it is true here, where Christ comes into the soul with his light, there is the heat of spiritual life going along with it. Christ gives us a taste of his word: "Thou hast taught me how sweet are thy words to my taste." Psalm cxix. 102, 103. It is one thing to read a promise, another to taste it. Such as would be Scripture proficients, let them get Christ to be their teacher. Luke xxiv. 45: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Christ did not only open the Scriptures, but opened their understanding.

XXIII. Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary. Wait diligently upon a rightly constituted ministry. Proverbs viii. 34: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates." Ministers are God's interpreters; it is their work to open and expound dark places of Scripture. We read of *pitchers* and *lamps* within the pitchers. Judges vii. 16. Ministers are earthen pitchers. 2 Cor. iv. 7. But these pitchers

have lamps within them, to light souls in the dark.

XXIV. Pray that God will make you profit. Isaiah xlviii. 17: "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit." Make David's prayer: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Psalm cxix. 18. Pray to God to take off the vail on the Scriptures, that you may understand it; and the vail on your heart, that you may believe it. Pray that God will not only give you his word as a *rule* of holiness, but his grace as a *principle* of holiness. Implore the guidance of God's Spirit. Neh. ix. 20: "Thou gavest them thy good Spirit to instruct them." Though the ship hath a compass to sail by, and store of tackling, yet without a gale of wind it cannot sail; though we have the word written as our compass to sail by, and make use of our endeavors as the tackling, yet unless the Spirit of God blow upon us, we cannot sail with profit. When the Almighty is as *dew* to us, then "we grow as the lily, and our beauty is as the olive tree." Hosea xiv. 5, 6: By the anointing of the Holy Ghost. One may see the figures on a dial, but he cannot tell how

the day goes unless the sun shine; we may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly till God's Spirit shine into our souls. 2 Cor. iv. 6. The Spirit is a Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Eph. i. 17. When Philip joined himself to the eunuch's chariot, then he understood the Scriptures. Acts viii. 35. When God's Spirit joins himself to the word, then it will be effectual to salvation. These rules observed, the word written would, through God's blessing, become an "engrafted word." James i. 21. A good scion grafted into a bad stock, changeth the nature of it, and makes it bear sweet and generous fruit. So when the word is grafted savingly into men's hearts, it doth sanctify them, and make them bring forth the sweet "fruits of righteousness." Phil. i. 11.

Thus I have answered this question, how we may read the Scriptures with most spiritual profit. In conclusion,

1. Content not yourselves with the bare reading of the Scriptures, but labor to find some spiritual improvement and profit. Get the word transcribed into your hearts. Psalm xxxvii. 31: "The law of his God is in his

heart." Such as profit by reading the book of God, are the best Christians alive; they answer God's cost, they credit religion, they save their souls.

2. You who have profited by reading the Holy Scriptures, adore God's distinguishing grace. Bless God that he hath not only brought the light to you, but opened your eyes to see it; that he hath unlocked his *hid treasure*, and enriched you with saving knowledge. Some perish by not *having* Scripture, and others by not *improving* it. That God should pass by millions, and the lot of his electing love should fall upon you; that the Scripture, like the *pillar of cloud*, should have a *dark side* to others, but a *light side* to you; that to others it should be a *dead letter*, but to you the *savor of life;* that Christ should not only be revealed *to* you, but *in* you; Gal. i. 16;—how should you be in an holy ecstacy of wonder, and wish that you had hearts of seraphims burning in love to God, and the voices of angels to make heaven ring with God's praises!

But some of the godly may say they fear they do not profit by the word they read. As in the body when there is a fainting of

the vital spirits, cordials are employed, so let me apply a few divine cordials to such as are ready to faint under the fear of non-proficiency.

1. You may profit by reading the word, though you come short of others. The ground which brought forth thirty fold, was good ground. Matt. xiii. 8. Say not that you have obtained no profit because you are not equal with other eminent saints; those were counted strong men among David's worthies, though they did not attain to the honor of the first three. 2 Sam. xxiii. 19.

2. You may profit by reading the word, though you are not of quick apprehension. Some impeach themselves because they are slow of understanding. When our blessed Saviour foretold his sufferings, the apostles themselves understood not, and it was *hid from them*. Luke ix. 45. The author to the Hebrews speaks of some who were dull of hearing. Heb. v. 11. Such as have weaker judgments may have stronger affections. A Christian with little knowledge may be kept from sin, as a man that hath but weak sight, yet is kept by it from falling into the water.

3. You may profit by reading Scripture,

although you have not *excellent memories*. Many complain their memories leak. Christian, art thou grieved that thou canst remember no more? Then for thy comfort,

1. Thou mayst have a good heart, though thou hast not so good a *memory*.

2. Though thou canst not remember all thou readest, yet thou rememberest that which is most *material*, and which thou hast most need of; at a feast we do not eat of every dish, but we take so much as nourisheth. It is with a good Christian's memory as it is with a lamp; though the lamp be not full of oil, yet it hath so much oil as makes the lamp burn; though thy memory be not full of Scripture, yet thou retainest so much as makes thy love to God to burn.

Then, be of good comfort, thou dost profit by what thou readest, and take notice of that encouraging Scripture, John xiv. 26: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, he shall bring all things to your remembrance." Amen.

SECRET PRAYER

SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED.

BY REV. SAMUEL LEE.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

The Rev. Samuel Lee, A. M., of Wadham College, Oxford, minister of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate.

The Rev. Samuel Lee was born in London, in 1627; his father was an eminent citizen, greatly esteemed for his private virtues, and lived to a good old age. He appears to have been a man of considerable property. Samuel was educated at St. Paul's School, under Dr. Gale, and then entered Wadham College, where he studied under the direction of Dr. Wilkins, afterwards the excellent Bishop of Chester. He made great attainments in knowledge and piety, and was so

highly esteemed as to be chosen fellow of his college and proctor of the university. There can be no doubt entertained respecting his religion or literature, when it is stated that he served as proctor in 1656, when Dr. Owen was Vice Chancellor.

In the following year he composed his Temple of Solomon, which he printed in folio, at the request and expense of the University. His reputation as a preacher led him to London, and he was inducted to the living of St. Botolph, the rectory of which was £355 per annum. Here he labored with usefulness and acceptance to his parish, till his ejectment in 1662, by the Bartholomew act. Mr. Lee was, in his view of Church discipline, a Congregationalist, but eminent for the display of charity and catholic spirit. After this trial we find him minister of an independent congregation, at Newington Green, near London. But the

persecution of the Church party continuing, he determined to escape from the tender mercies of the cruel, and, in 1686, he embarked for New England, where he was received with attention and respect, and soon became pastor of the Church at Bristol, R. I., where he labored for three years, when, hearing of the glorious revolution of 1688, and wishing to enjoy its fruits, and obtain his valuable estate, he became so desirous to return, that he embarked with his family in mid-winter. He sailed from Boston for England in the Dolphin, Capt. John Foy. The passage was very tedious, owing to the prevalence of easterly winds, and at length, on the coast of Ireland, they fell in with a French privateer. After a severe resistance, and when in great danger of sinking, they were compelled to surrender, and the Dolphin was carried as a prize to St. Maloes, in France.

After some detention, his wife and daughter and two servants were sent to England by the king's order, while he was retained a prisoner. Grief at the loss of his family, and his solitary condition in a strange land, brought on a fever, of which he died in a few days, aged 64.

SECRET PRAYER
SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED.

"But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."—*Matt.* vi. 6.

We have here our blessed Lord's instructions for the management of secret prayer, the crown and glory of a child of God.

1. The direction prescribed for our deportment in secret duty in three things: 1. Enter thy closet; this word signifies a secret or recluse habitation, and sometimes it is rendered a hiding place for treasure. 2. "*Shut thy door*," or *lock it*, as the word intimates. The Greek word furnishes the term "key," as appears by Rev. iii. 7, and xx. 1, 3, implying that we must bar or bolt it. 3. "*Pray to thy Father which is in secret.*" "*Father.*" Tertullian notes this name, as intimating both *piety* and *power*; "thy Father" denoting *intimacy* and *propriety*.

II. A gracious promise which may be

branched into three parts: 1. For thy Father sees thee in secret, his eye is upon thee with a gracious aspect, when thou art withdrawn from all the world. 2. He will reward thee. The word used here is sometimes translated by *rendering*, Matt. xxii. 21. Rom. ii. 6, and xiii. 7; by *delivering*, Matt. xxvii. 58. Luke ix. 42; by *yielding*, or *affording*, Heb. xii. 11. Rev. xxii. 2. All which comes to this; he will return thy prayers or thy requests, amply and abundantly into thy bosom. 3. He will do it openly, manifestly; before the world sometimes, and most plentifully and exuberantly before men and angels at the great day; secret prayers shall have open and public answers.

III. Here is a demonstration of sincerity, from the *right* performance of the duty set forth by the antithesis in the fifth verse. "But thou shalt not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." Enter not thy house only, or thy common chamber, but thy closet, the most secret and retired privacy, that others may neither discern thee nor rush in

suddenly upon thee. God will answer thee and perform thy request, as a gracious return to thy secret sincerity. God is pleased by promise to make himself a debtor to secret prayer. It brings nothing to God but empty hands and naked hearts; to show that reward in Scripture sense, does not flow in on the streams of merit, but of grace. It is monkish divinity to assert otherwise; for what merit strictly taken can there be in prayer? The mere asking of mercy cannot merit it at the hands of God. Malachi ii. 3. Our most sincere petitions are impregnated with sinful mixtures. We halt, like Jacob, both in and after our choicest and strongest wrestlings. But such is the grace of our heavenly Father, who spies that little sincerity of our hearts in secret, that he is pleased to accept us in his beloved, and to smell a sweet savor in the fragrant perfumes and odors of his intercession.

Though I might draw many notes hence, I shall treat of but one, containing the marrow and nerves of the text:

That secret prayer duly managed is the mark of a sincere heart, and hath the promise of a gracious return.

Prayer is the soul's colloquy with God, and secret prayer is a conference with God upon admission into the privy chamber of heaven. When thou hast shut thine own closet, when God and thy soul are alone, with this key thou openest the chambers of paradise, and enterest the closet of divine love. When thou art immured as in a curious labyrinth, apart from the tumultuous world, and entered into that garden of Lebanon in the midst of thy closet; thy soul, like a spiritual Dædalus, takes to itself the wings of faith and prayer, and flies into the midst of heaven, among the cherubims. I may serve secret prayer the invisible flight of the soul into the bosom of God; out of this heavenly closet rises Jacob's ladder, whose rounds are all of light; its foot stands upon the basis of the Covenant in thy heart, its top reaches the throne of grace. When thy reins have instructed thee in the night season with holy petitions, when thy soul hath desired him in the night, then with thy spirit within thee wilt thou seek him early. When the door of thy heart is shut, and the windows of thy eyes are sealed up from all vain and worldly objects, up thou mountest, and

hast a place given thee to walk among angels that stand by the throne of God. Zech. iii. 7. In secret prayer the soul, like Moses, is in the back side of the desert, and talks with the angel of the covenant in the fiery bush. Ex. iii. 1. Here 's Isaac in the field at eventide, meditating and praying to the God of his father Abraham. Gen. xxiv. 63. Here 's Elijah, under the juniper tree at Rithmah in the wilderness, and anon in the cave hearkening to the still small voice of God. 1 Kings xix. 4, 12. Here 's Christ and the spouse alone in the wine-cellar, and the banner of love over her, and she utters but half words, having drunk of the sober excess of the spirit. Cant. ii. 4. Eph. v. 18. Here we find Nathaniel under the fig-tree, though it may be at secret prayer, yet under a beam of the eye of Christ. John i. 48. There sits Austin in the garden alone, sighing with the Psalmist, "How long, O Lord," and listening to the voice of God, take up the Bible and read. (Confessions, 1st book, 8th chapter.) It is true, hypocrites may pray, and pray alone, and pray long, and receive their reward from such whose observations they desire, but a hypocrite takes no sincere delight in secret

devotion, he has no spring of affection to God. But O my dove, says Christ, that art in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice, for the melody thereof is sweet. A weeping countenance and a wounded spirit are most beautiful prospects to the eye of heaven, when a broken heart pours out repentant tears like streams from the rock smitten by the rod of Moses' law in the hand of a mediator. O how amiable in the sight of God the cry, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee;" which Chrysostom glosses thus, to "draw sighs from the furrows of the heart." Let thy prayer become a hidden mystery of divine secrets, like good Hezekiah upon the bed with his face to the wall, that none might observe him; or like our blessed Lord, that grand example, who retired into mountains and solitudes apart, and saw by night the illustrious face of his heavenly Father in prayer.

The *reasons* why secret prayer is the mark of a sincere heart, are as follow: 1. Because a sincere heart busies itself about heart work, to mortify sin, to quicken grace, to observe and resist temptation, to secure and advance his evidences; therefore it is much

conversant with secret prayer. The glory of the king's daughter shines within, arrayed with clothes of gold, but they are the spangled and glittering hangings of the closet of her heart, when she entertains communion with her Lord. The more a saint converses with his own heart, the more he searches his spiritual wants, and feels his spiritual joys. 2. Because a sincere heart aims at the eye of God, he knows that God, being a spirit, loves to converse with our spirits, and to speak to the heart more than the outward ear; he labors to walk before God, as being always in his sight, but especially when he presents himself at the footstool of mercy. An invisible God is delighted with invisible prayers, when no eye sees but his; he takes most pleasure in the secret glances of a holy heart. But no more of this; let us descend to the question deducible from the text, a question of no less importance than daily use, and of peculiar concernment *to the growth of every Christian.*

How to manage secret prayer that it may be prevalent with God, to the comfort and satisfaction of the soul.

For method's sake, I shall divide it into two branches.

I. How to manage secret prayer, that it may prevail with God.

II. How to discern and discover answers to secret prayer, that the soul may acquiesce and be satisfied that it hath prevailed with God.

Before I handle these, I would briefly prove the DUTY AND ITS USEFULNESS, leaving some cases about its attendants and circumstances towards the close.

As to the DUTY itself, the text is plain and distinct in the point; yet further observe in Solomon's prayer, that if any man beside the community of the people of Israel shall present his supplication to God, he there prays for a gracious and particular answer; and we know Solomon's prayer was answered by fire, and so we learn a promise given forth to personal prayer. 1 Kings viii. 38, 39. 2 Chron. vi. 29, 30. 2 Chron. vii. 1. Beside the many special and particular injunctions to individual persons, as Job xxii. 27, and xxxiii. 26. Psalm xxxii. 6. Psalm 1. 15. Wives as well as husbands are to

pray apart, Zech. xii. 14, solitary, by themselves. James v. 13.

We may argue this point from the constant practice of the holy saints of God in all ages, but especially of our blessed Lord; and it is our wisdom to walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous, as Abraham, Eliezer, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Hezekiah, David, Daniel. The time would fail me to bring in the cloud of witnesses. Our Lord we find sometimes in a desert, in a mountain, in a garden, at prayer; Cornelius in his house, and Peter upon the house-top, in secret supplication to God.

There is the experience of God's gracious presence, and answers sent in upon secret prayer, as in the stories of Eliezer, Jabez, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Cornelius and Paul. For *this cause*, because David was heard, shall every one that is godly pray unto him.

I might urge the USEFULNESS, nay in some cases the necessities, of secret applications to God.

1. Are we not guilty of secret sins in the light of God's countenance, that cannot, ought not to be confessed before others, insomuch that near relations are exhorted to

secret and solitary duties? Zech. xii. 12. 1 Cor. vii. 4. 2. Are there not personal wants that we would prefer to God alone? 3. Are there not some special mercies and deliverances that concern our own persons more peculiarly, which should engage us to commune with our own hearts, and offer the sacrifices of righteousness to God? 4. May there not be found some requests to be poured out more particularly in secret, as to other persons, and as to the affairs of the church of God, which may not be commodiously insisted upon in common? 5. Do not sudden and urgent passions spring out of the soul in secret, that would be unbecoming in social prayer? 6. To argue from the text, may not the soul's secret addresses about inward sorrows and joys be a sweet testimony of the sincerity and integrity of the heart, when the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddles not with his joy? Perhaps a man has an Ishmael, an Absalom, a Rehoboam, to weep for, and therefore gets into an inward chamber, where behold his witness is in heaven, and his record on high, and when others may scorn or pity, his eye poureth out tears unto God.

To end this, when a holy soul is close in secret, what complacency does it take when it has bolted out the world, and retired to a place that none knows of, to be free from the disturbances and distractions that often violate family communion. When the soul is in the secret place of the Most High, and in the shadow of the Almighty, O how safe, how comfortable!

Nor can I insist upon secret prayer, under the variety of mental and vocal, nor enlarge upon it as sudden, occasional, or ejaculatory, referring somewhat of this toward the end.

I must remark that there are some things which aptly belong to secret prayer, yet being coincident with all prayer, public, social and secret, it is proper to treat of those which are important to our present duty, and must therefore refer to a double head.

I. How shall we manage secret prayer, as it is coincident with prayer in general, so that it may prevail?

1. Use some preparation before it, rush not suddenly into the awful presence of God. Sanctuary preparation is necessary to sanctuary communion. Such suitable preparatory frames of mind come down from God.

It was a good saying of one, "*He never prays ardently that does not premeditate devoutly.*" It is said of Daniel, when he made that famous prayer, he *set his face* to seek the Lord. Dan. ix. 3. Jehoshaphat also *set himself* to seek the Lord. 2 Chron. xx. 3. The church in her soul desires the Lord in the night, and then in the morning she seeks him early. Desires blown by meditation are the sparks that set prayer in a light flame. The work of preparation may be cast under five heads, when we apply to solemn, set prayer.

1. The consideration of some attributes in God that are proper to the intended petitions. 2. A digestion of some peculiar and special promises that concern the affair. 3. Meditation on suitable arguments. 4. Ejaculations for assistance. 5. An engagement of the heart to a holy frame of reverence and keeping to the point in hand. That was good advice from Cyprian: "Let the soul think upon nothing but what it is to pray for," and he adds that therefore the ministers of old prepared the minds of the people with "let your hearts be above." For how can we expect to be heard of God when we do not hear ourselves, when the heart does not watch,

while the tongue utters? The tongue must be like the pen of a ready writer, to set down the good matter which the heart indites. Take heed of ramblings. To preach or tell pious stories, while praying to the great and holy God, is a branch of irreverence and a careless frame of spirit. Heb. xii. 28.

2. Humble confession of such sins as concern and refer principally to the work in hand. Our filthy garments must be put away when we appear before the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem. Zech. iii. 4. "Look upon my afflictions," says David, and "forgive all my sins." There are certain sins that often relate to afflictions. First "deliver me from transgression, then hear my prayer, O Lord." This is the heavenly method; he first forgiveth all our iniquities, and then healeth all our diseases. Psalm ciii. 3. A forgiven soul is a healed soul. While a man is sick at heart with the qualms of sin unpardoned, it keeps the soul in dismay that it cannot cry strongly to God, and therefore in holy groans must discharge himself of particular sins. Thus did David in that great penitential psalm. Psalm li. Sin, like a thick cloud, hides the face of God, that our

prayers cannot enter. Isaiah lix. 2. We must blush with Ezra, and our faces look red with the flushings of conscience, if we expect any smiles of mercy. Ezra ix. 6. Our crimson sins must dye our confessions, and the blood of our sacrifices must sprinkle the horns of the golden altar, before we receive an answer of peace from the golden mercy seat. When our persons are pardoned, our suits are accepted, and our petitions crowned with the olive branch of peace.

3. An arguing and pleading spirit in prayer This is properly wrestling with God; humble yet earnest expostulations about his mind toward us. "Why hast thou cast us off forever; why doth thy anger smoke? Be not wroth very sore, O Lord; remember not iniquity forever; see, we beseech thee, we are thy people." Psalm lxxiv. 1; Isaiah lxiv. 9. If so, why is it thus? as affrighted Rebekah flies out into prayer, Gen. xxv. 22. An arguing frame in prayer, cures and appeases the frights of spirit and then inquires of God. The temple of prayer is called the soul's inquiring place. I must refer to Abraham, Jacob and Moses, Joshua, David and Daniel, how they used arguments with God.

Sometimes from the multitudes of God's mercies; Psalm v. 7, and vi. 4, and xxxi. 16. From the experience of former answers; Psalm iv. 1, and vi. 9, and xxii. 4. From their trust and reliance upon him; Psalm ix. 10, and xvi. 1. From the equity of God; Psalm xvii. 1. From the shame and confusion of face that God will put his people to if not answered, and that others will be driven away from God; Psalm xxxi. 17, and xxxiv. 1. And lastly from the promise of peace; Psalm xx. 5, and xxxv. 18. These, and many like pleadings, we find in Scripture for patterns in prayer, which being suggested by the Spirit, kindled from the altar, and perfumed with Christ's incense, rise up like memorial pillars before the oracle. Let us observe in one or two particular prayers, what instant arguments holy men have used and pressed in their perplexities. What a working prayer did Jehoshaphat make, taking pleas from God's covenant, dominion and powerful strength; from his gift of the land of Canaan and driving out the old inhabitants; ancient mercies! from his sanctuary, and promise to Solomon; from the ingratitude and ill requital of his enemies, with an ap-

peal to God's equity in the case, and an humble confession of their own impotency; and yet that in their anxiety their eyes are fixed upon God. 2 Chron. xx. 10, &c. You know how gloriously it prevailed when he set ambushments round about the court of heaven, and the Lord turned his arguments into ambushments against the children of Edom. Yes, this is set as an instance how God will deal against the enemies of his church in the latter days. Joel iii. 2. Another instance is that admirable prayer of the angel of the covenant to God, for the restoration of Jerusalem, Zech. i. 12, wherein he pleads from the length of time and the duration of his indignation for threescore and ten years; from promised mercies and the expiration of prophecies; and behold an answer of good and comfortable words from the Lord; and pray observe that when arguments in prayer are very cogent upon a sanctified heart, such being drawn from the divine attributes, from precious promises and sweet experiments of God's former love, it is a rare sign of a prevailing prayer. It was an ingenious remark of Chrysostom concerning the woman of Canaan: the poor distressed creature was

turned an acute philosopher with Christ, and disputed the mercy from him. O 't is a blessed thing to attain to this heavenly philosophy of prayer, to argue blessings out of the hand of God. Here is a spacious field; I have given but a small prospect, where the soul like Jacob enters the list with omnipotency, and by holy force obtains the blessing.

4. Ardent affections in prayer, betokening a heart deeply sensible, are greatly prevalent; a crying prayer pierces the depths of heaven. We read not a word that Moses spoke, but God was moved by his cry. Ex. xiv. 15. I mean not an obstreperous noise, but melting moans of heart. Yet sometimes the sore and pinching necessities and distresses of spirit extort even vocal cries, not unpleasant to the ear of God. "I cried to the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. And this encourages David to a fresh onset: "Hearken to the voice of my cry, my King and my God; give ear to my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears." Another time he makes the cave echo with his cries: "I cried, attend to my cry, for I am brought very low." And what is the issue? Faith gets courage by crying;

his tears watered his faith, so that it grew into confidence; and so concludes, "thou shalt deal bountifully with me, and the righteous shall crown me for conqueror." Psalm cxlii. 1, 5, 6, 7. Plentiful tears bring bountiful mercies, and a crying suitor proves a triumphant praiser. Holy Jacob was just such another, at the fords of Jabbok; he wept and made supplication, and prevailed with the angel. The Lord told Hezekiah he had heard his prayer, for he had seen his tears. Such precedents may well encourage backsliding Ephraim to return and bemoan himself, and then the bowels of God are troubled for him. Nay, we have a holy woman also weeping sore before the Lord in Shiloh, and then rejoicing in his salvation. 1 Sam. i. 10, and ii. 1. The cries of saints are like vocal music joined with the instrumental of prayer; they make heavenly melody in the ears of God. The bridegroom calls to his mourning dove, "let me hear thy voice, for it is pleasant." What Gerson says of the sores of Lazarus, we may say of sighs: "as many wounds, so many tongues." Cries and groans in prayer are so many eloquent orators at the throne of God.

5. Importunity and assiduity in prayer are highly prevalent. Not that we should lengthen out our prayer with tedious and vain repetitions, as the heathen did of old, but we should be frequent and instant in prayer. As Christ bids us to pray always, and the apostle Paul to pray without ceasing, we learn the duty of constancy in prayer. As the morning and evening sacrifice at the temple is called the *continual* burnt offering; Numb. xxviii. 4, 6; as Mephibosheth is said to eat bread *continually* at David's table, and Solomon's servants to stand *continually* before him, that is, at the set and appointed times, so it is required of us to be constant and assiduous at prayer, and to offer our prayers with perseverance. When the soul perseveres in prayer, it is a sign of persevering faith, and such may have what they will at the hand of God, when praying according to divine direction. John xvi. 23. Nay, urgent prayer is a token of a mercy at hand. When Elijah prayed seven times, one after another, for rain, the clouds presently march up out of the sea at the command of prayer. 1 Kings xviii. 43. "Ask of me things to come, and concerning the works of my

hands command ye me," saith the Lord. Isaiah xlv. 11. When we put forth our utmost strength in prayer, and will as it were receive no nay from Heaven, our prayers must be like the continual blowing of the silver trumpets over the sacrifices, for a memorial before the Lord. Numbers x. 10. Like the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem which never hold their peace day nor night, we are commanded not to keep silence, nor give him rest. Isaiah lxii. 6, 7. Nay, God seems offended at another time that they did not lay hands on him, that they might not be consumed in their iniquities. Such prayers are as it were a holy molestation to the throne of grace. Isaiah lxiv. 7. It is said of the man that rose at midnight to give out three loaves to his friend, that he did it not for friendship's sake, but because he was pressing, so importunate as to trouble him at such a season as twelve o'clock at night. Luke xi. 8. Our Lord applies the parable to instant prayer. It was so with the success of the widow with the unjust judge, because she did vex and molest him with her solicitations. Luke xviii. 5. But of all, the pattern of the woman of Canaan

is most admirable, when the disciples desired her to be dismissed because she troubled them by crying after them, and yet she persists. Matt. xv. 23. May I say it reverently, Christ delights in such a troublesome person. Augustine observes, by comparing both evangelists, that first she cried after Christ in the streets, but our Lord taking to a house, she follows him thither and falls down at his feet, but as yet he answered her not a word; then our Lord going out of the house again, she follows with stronger importunity, and argues the mercy into her bosom, and Christ ascribes it to the greatness of her faith. To knock at midnight is deemed no incivility at the gate of heaven. An energetic prayer is likely to be an efficacious prayer. Cold petitioners must have cold answers. If the matter of prayer be right, and the promise of God fervently urged, thou art likely to prevail like princely Israel, that held the angel and would not let him go until he had blessed him.

Query. But can God be moved by our arguments or affected with our troubles? He is the unchangeable God and dwells in

the inaccessible light, and with him is no variableness nor shadow of turning.

I reply. These holy motions upon the hearts of saints in prayer are the fruits of his love to them, and the appointed ushers-in of mercy. God graciously determines to give a praying, arguing, warm, affectionate frame as the forerunner of a decreed mercy. That is the reason that carnal men can enjoy no such mercies, because they pour out no such prayers. The spirit of prayer prognosticates mercy near at hand. When the Lord by Jeremiah foretold the end of the captivity, he also predicts the prayers that should open the gates of Babylon. Cyrus was prophesied of, to do his work for Jacob his servant's sake, and Israel his elect, but yet they must ask him concerning those things to come, and they should not seek him in vain. Isa. xlv. 1, 2, 4. Isa. xlv. 19. The glory of the latter days in the return of Israel, is foretold by Ezekiel; but then "the Lord will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Ez. xxxvi. 24, 37. The coming of Christ is promised by himself; but yet "the spirit and bride say come, and he that heareth must say come," and when Christ says

he will "come quickly," we must add, "even so come Lord Jesus."

Divine grace kindles these ardent affections when the mercies promised are upon the wing. Prayer is that chain, as Dionysius calls it, that draws the soul up to God, and the mercy down to us; or like the cable that draws the ship to land, though the shore itself remains unmovable. Prayer has its kindling from heaven, like the ancient sacrifices, that were inflamed with celestial fire.

6. Submission to the all-wise and holy will of God. This is the great benefit of a saint's communion with the Spirit, that he maketh intercession for them according to the will of God. When we pray for holiness there is a concurrence with the divine will, for "this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1 Thess. iv. 3. When we pray that our bodies may be presented a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, we then prove "what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God." Rom. xii. 1, 2. In the covenant of grace, God does his part and ours too. As when God commands us to pray in one place, he promises in another place "to pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplica-

tion." Zech. xii. 10. God commands us to repent and turn to him. Ezek. xiv. 6. In another place, Jer. xxxi. 18, "turn thou me and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God." And again, "turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned." Lament. v. 21. And again, "a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. And Paul says, "for this cause I cease not to pray for you, that he would work in you that which is well pleasing in his sight." Col. i. 9, 10. Heb. xiii. 21. "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. ii. 12, 13. Precepts, promises and prayer are connected like so many golden links to excite, encourage and assist the soul in spiritual duties. But in other cases, as to temporal and temporary mercies, let all thy desires in prayer be formed with submission, guided by his counsel and prostrate at his feet, and acted by a faith suited to the promises of outward blessings, and then it shall be unto thee even as thou wilt. Gerson said well: "Let all thy desires as to temporals turn upon the

hinge of the divine good pleasure." That man shall have his own will, that resolves to make God's will his. God will certainly bestow that which is for the good of his people.

One great point of our mortification lies in this: to have our wills melted into God's; and it is a great token of spiritual growth, when we are not only content but joyful to see our wills crossed that his may be done. When our wills are sacrifice of holy prayer, we many times receive choicer things than we ask expressly. It was a good saying, "God many times grants not what we would in our present prayers, that he may bestow what we would rather have, when we have the prayer more graciously answered than we petitioned." We know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit helps us out with groans that secretly hint a correction of our wills and spirits in prayer. In great anxieties and pinching troubles, nature dictates strong groans for relief, but sustaining grace and participation of divine holiness, mortification from earthly comforts, excitation of the soul to long for heaven, being gradually weaned from the wormwood breasts of their sublunary, transient and unsatisfy-

ing pleasures, and the timing of our hearts for the seasons wherein God will time his deliverances; are sweeter mercies than the immediate return of a prayer for an outward good. What truly holy person would lose that light of God's countenance which he enjoyed by glimpses in a cloudy day, for a little corn and wine? Nay, in many cases open denials of prayer prove the most excellent answers, and God's not hearing us is the most signal audience. Therefore at the foot of every prayer subscribe "thy will be done," and thou shalt enjoy preventing mercies that thou never soughtest, and converting mercies to change all for the best, resting confident in this, that having asked according to his will he heareth thee.

7, and lastly. Present all into the hands of Christ. This was signified of old by praying toward the temple, because the golden mercy seat typifying Christ was there. 1 Kings viii. 33. Heb. viii. 3. He is ordained of God to offer gifts and sacrifices, and therefore it is of necessity that he should have something from us to offer, being the high priest over the house of God.

Heb. x. 21. What does Christ on our behalf at the throne of grace? Put some petition into the hands of Christ; he waits for our offerings at the door of the oracle; leave the sighs and groans of thy heart with this compassionate intercessor, who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, who sympathizes with our weaknesses. He that lies in the Father's bosom, and hath *expounded* the will of God to us, John i. 18, adds much incense to the prayers of all saints before the throne of God, and explains our wills to God, so that our prayers perfumed by his are set forth as incense before him. Rev. viii. 3. Ps. cxli. 2. He is the day's-man the heaven's-man betwixt God and us. Job ix. 23. Whatever we ask in his name he puts into his golden censer, that the Father may give it to us. John xv. 16, and xvi. 23. When the sweet smoke of the incense of Christ's prayer ascends before the Father, our prayers become sweet and amiable, and cause a savor of rest with God. This I take to be one reason why the prevalency of prayer is so often assigned to the time of the evening sacrifice, pointing at the death of Christ about the ninth hour of the day,

near the time of the evening oblation. Matt. xxvii. 46. Acts iii. 1; x. 30. Hence it was too, that Abraham's sacrifice received a gracious answer, being offered about the going down of the sun. Gen. xv. 12, and xxiv. 63. Isaac went out to pray at even tide. Elijah at Mount Carmel prays and offers at the time of the evening sacrifice. 1 Kings xviii. 36. Ezra fell upon his knees and spread out his hands at the evening sacrifice. Ezra ix. 5. David prays that his prayer may be virtual in the power of the evening sacrifice. Ps. cxli. 2. Daniel at prayer was touched by the angel about the time of the evening sacrifice. Dan. ix. 21. All to show the prevalency of our access to the throne of grace by the merit of the intercession of Christ the acceptable evening sacrifice. Yea, and therefore we are taught in our Lord's prayer to begin with the title of a father; in him we are adopted to be children, and to use that prevalent relation as an argument in prayer.

There are some other particulars in respect to prayer in general, as it may be connected and coincident with secret prayer, as stability of spirit; freedom from distraction by wandering thoughts; the acting of faith; the

aids of the Spirit; all which I pass by, and come to

DIRECTIONS, SPECIAL AND PECULIAR, TO SECRET PRAYER.

1. Be sure of intimate acquaintance with God. Can we presume, that are but dust and ashes, to go up into heaven and boldly to enter the presence chamber, and have no fellowship with the Father or with the Son? "Acquaint thyself with him and be at peace; then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee. The decrees of thy heart shall be established to thee, and the light shall shine upon thy ways." Job xxii. 21, 26, 27, 28. First shining acquaintance, and then shining answers. Canst thou set thy face unto the Lord God? then thou mayst seek him by prayer; first Daniel sets and shows his face to God, and then seeks him by prayer and supplication. Daniel ix. 3. Does God know your face in prayer? do you often converse in your closets with him? Believe it, it must be the fruit of intimate acquaintance with God to meet him in secret with delight. Can ye come familiarly as a child to a father,

considering its own vileness, meanness or unworthiness in comparison with his divine love, the love and bowels of a heavenly father. Such a father, the father of fathers, and the father of mercies. How sweetly does the apostle join it! God is our father because the father of our Lord; and because his father, so our father, therefore the father of mercies. 2 Cor. i. 2, 3. O what generations of mercies flow from this paternity! But we must plead to this access to the Father through Christ by the Spirit. Eph. ii. 18. We must be gradually acquainted with all three; first with the Spirit, then with Christ, and last with the Father. First God sends the spirit of his Son into our hearts, and then through the Son we cry Abba Father. Gal. iv. 6. Eph. i. 4. The bowels of mercy first wrought in the Father to us, he chose us in Christ, and then sends his Spirit to draw us to Christ, and by Christ to himself. Have you this access to God by the Spirit? Bosom communion flows from bosom affections. If your souls are truly in love with God, he will graciously say to your petitions, be it unto you according to your love.

2. The times of finding God. A godly man prays in finding seasons. When God's heart and ear are inclined to audience, then God is said to bow down his ear. There are special seasons of drawing nigh to him, when he draws nigh to us; times when he may be found. When thy "beloved looks forth at the window, and shows himself through the lattice." Ps. xxxi. 2. Isa. lv. 6. Ps. xxxii. 6. Cant. ii. 9. That is a time of grace when God knocks at the door of thy heart by his Spirit. Motions upon the heart are like the doves of the East, sent with letters about their necks. It is said of Bernard, he knew when the Holy Spirit was present with him by the motions of his heart. When God reveals himself to the heart, he opens the ears of his servants for some gracious message. When God bids us seek his face, then the soul must answer, "One thing have I desired, that will I seek after." Holy desires warm the heart and set the soul on seeking; they are like messengers sent from heaven to bring us into God's presence. Take heed then of quenching the Spirit of God. He that is born of the Spirit knows the voice of the Spirit. John iii. 8. When the soul is

melted by the word, or softened by affliction, or feels some holy groans and sighs excited by the Spirit, that is a warm time for prayer. Then we enjoy intimations of the presence of God. Romans viii. 27. Or when prophecies are near to expire, then there are great workings and searchings of hearts in Daniel, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna; or when some promise comes with applying power, "therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee, for thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant." 2 Sam. vii. 27, 28. When we find promises dropped into the soul like wine, it causes the lips of them that are asleep to speak. Cant. vii. 9.

3. Keep conscience clear and clean from secret sins. With what face can we go to a friend to whom we have given any secret affront? And will ye be so bold as to come before the God of heaven when he knows ye maintain some secret sin in your hearts? Darest thou to bring a Dalilah with thee into this sacred closet? True is that remark of Tertullian: "He that turns his ear from God's precepts must stop his mouth in the dust, if God turn his holy ears from their

cry." When our secret sins are in the light of his countenance, we may rather expect to be consumed by his anger and terrified by his wrath. Ps. xc. 7, 8.

But it is perhaps objected—Then who may presume and venture into secret communion? True; if God should strictly mark what we do amiss, who can stand? David was sensible of this objection, but he answers it humbly: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared." Ps. cxxx. 4. If we come with holy purposes, God hath promised to pardon abundantly. Isa. lv. 7. His thoughts and ways are not as our ways; guilt makes us fly his presence; but proclamation of pardoning grace to a wounded soul that comes for strength from heaven to subdue its iniquities, sweetly draws the soul to lie at his feet for mercy. Though we cannot as yet be so free as formerly, while under the wounding sense of guilt, yet when he "restores to us the joy of his salvation he will again uphold us with his free spirit." Ps. li. 12. Yet take heed of *scars* upon the soul. God knows our foolishness, and our guiltinesses are not hid from him; yet we come for purging and cleans-

ing mercy. A godly man may be under the sense of the divine displeasure for some iniquity that himself knoweth, as the Lord spake of Eli; yet the way to be cured is not to run from God, but like the distressed woman, come fearing and trembling, and fall at his feet, and tell him all the truth. But if prayer have cured thee, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee. Matt. v. 33. For if we "regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us," but the guilt may stare conscience in the face with great amazement. Ps. lxvi. 18. It is storied of one who secretly had stolen a sheep, that it ran before his eyes in prayer, that he could have no rest. How strangely will memory ring the bell in the ears of Conscience, if we have any secret sin, if we look but aside with desires and secret thoughts (after our peace-offering) to meet our beloved lusts again. This is dangerous. God may justly give up such to cast off that which is good, to cleave to their idols, and let them alone. But if the face of the heart be not knowingly and willingly spotted with any sin and lust, (bating infirmities which he mourns under,) then thy countenance through Christ

will be comely in the eye of God, and thy voice sweet in his ears, and as he said, "he who prays well, lives well," so a holy life will be a walking continual prayer; his very life is a constant petition before God.

4. Own thy personal interest with God, and plead it humbly. Consider whom thou goest to in secret; "pray to thy Father who seeth in secret." Canst thou prove thyself to be in covenant? what thou canst prove thou mayst plead, and have it successfully issued. In prayer we take God's covenant into our mouths, but without a real interest; the Lord expostulates with such; what have they to do with it? Ps. l. 15, 16. God never graciously hears, but it is upon interest. This argument Solomon presses in prayer: "for they be thy people and thine inheritance." 1 Kings viii. 51. Thus David pleads: "Thou art my God; hear the voice of my supplication." Ps. cxl. 6. "I am thine, save me." Ps. cxix. 94. "Truly I am thy servant." Ps. cxvi. 16. Asa turns the contest heavenwards: "O Lord, thou art our God, let not mortal man prevail against thee; thou takest me for the sheep of thy fold, and the servant of thy household, therefore seek

me." 2 Chron. xiv. 11. When Israel shall be refined as silver and tried as gold, "they shall call on his name and he will hear them. I will say it is my people, my tried, refined, golden people, and they shall say the Lord is my God." Ps. cxix. 176, and Zech. xiii. 9. When thou canst discern the print of the broad seal of the covenant upon thy heart, and the privy seal of the Spirit upon thy prayers, and canst look upon the Son of God in a sacerdotal relation to thee, thou mayst come boldly to "the throne of grace in time of need." Heb. iv. 16.

5. Be very particular in secret prayer, both as to sins, wants and mercies. Hide none of thy transgressions, if thou expect a pardon. Be not ashamed to open all thy necessities. David argues because he is poor and needy. Ps. xl. 17; lxx. 5; lxxxvi 1; cix. 22. Four several times he presses his wants and exigences before God, like an earnest but holy beggar, and showed before him his trouble, presents his ragged condition and secret wounds, as Job said he would "order his cause before him." Job xxiii. 4. There we may speak out our minds fully, and name the persons that afflict, affront, and

trouble us; and wo to them that a child of God upon a mature judgment names in prayer. I do not find that such a prayer in Scripture returned empty. Jacob in a great strait, "Deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." Gen. xxxii. 11. David in the ascent of Mount Olives, "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness." 2 Sam. xv. 31. Prayer twisted the rope for him at Giloh. Thus Jehoshaphat in his prayer names Ammon, Moab and Edom conspiring against him. 2 Chron. xx. 10. Thus Hezekiah spreads the railing letter before the Lord. Isa. xxxvii. 14. And the Psalmist takes them all into a round catalogue that counselled against Israel. Ps. lxxxiii. 6, &c. Thus the church in her prayer names Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, whereof the first was sent into perpetual banishment, and the latter slew himself. Josephus, L. 18, c. 9. Euseb. Chron. L. 2, p. 159. It is of great use in prayer, to attend to some special case or single request, with arguments and affections suitable. "For this cause," says Paul, "I bow the knee." Eph. iii. 14. Suppose a grace deficient in its strength; "Lord,

increase our faith." Luke xvii. 5. Or a temptation urgent; "For this I prayed to the Lord thrice." 2 Cor. xii. 8. A great reason why we reap so little benefit by prayer, is because we rest too much in generals; and if we have success, it is but dark, so that often we cannot tell what to make of the issues of prayer. Besides, to be particular in our petitions would keep the spirit much from wandering, when we are intent upon a weighty case, and the progress of the soul in grace would manifest its gradual success in prayer.

6. Holy and humble appeals before the Lord in secret, when the soul can submissively and thankfully expose itself to divine searching. The soul cannot dwell in the presence of God under the flashing of defilement, neither will the Holy Spirit own a defiled soul. But when a person can humbly, modestly and reverently say, "Search me and try my reins, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," Psalm cxxxix. 23, it will be the means of the ebullitions and boilings up of joyful affections and meek confidence at the footstool of grace, especially in pleas

of deliverance from wicked and proud enemies. When David can plead in the case stated between his enemies and himself, "for I am holy," Ps. lxxxvi. 2, 14, 17, it shows him a token for good; or when we plead against the assaults of Satan, can we be conscious that we have watched and prayed against entering into temptation? When in the main we can wash our hands in innocency, we may then comfortably compass God's altar about. In case of opposition and injustice: "He rewarded me (says David in the point of Saul) according to my righteousness and the cleanness of my hands before him." Ps. xviii. 20. Or about the truth of the love that is in the heart to God: "Thou that knowest all things knoweth that I love thee." John xxi. 17. As to zeal for the worship and ordinances of God, so did Nehemiah: Neh. xiii. 14, 22. As to the integrity of a well-spent life, so did Hezekiah: Isa. xxxviii. 3. Or if we cannot rise so high, yet as the church did: "The desire of our soul is to thy name and to the remembrance of thee." Isa. xxvi. 8. Or lastly, when we can unfeignedly plead the usefulness of a mercy entreated in order to the divine glory;

as when a minister, or the church of Christ for him, prays for such gifts and graces—such knowledge and utterance—that he may win souls to Christ, and can appeal that it is his principal aim, this is glorious! Eph. vi. 19. Col. iv. 3.

7. Pray for the Spirit, that ye may pray in and by the Spirit. "Awaken the north wind and the south, to blow upon thy garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth." Cant. iv. 16. Then thou mayst invite Christ: "Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruit," that the soul may enjoy him and hold sweet communion with him. All successful prayer is from the breathing of the Spirit of God, when he inspires and indites, when he directs the heart as to matter and governs the tongue as to utterance. God graciously hears the sighs of his own Spirit formed in us. He sends forth his Spirit, and "the waters flow." Ps. cxlvii. 18. The waters of contrition flow upon the breathing of the Spirit, and the soul is as it were all afloat before the throne of grace, when these living waters issue from under the threshold of the sanctuary. Ezek. xlvii. 1. Devout tears drop down

from the Spirit's influences. Melting supplications follow the infusions of grace by the Spirit. "Then they shall mourn for piercing of Christ," says the prophet, "and be in bitterness as for a first-born," like the mourning at the town of Hadadrimmon, where Josiah was slain. Zech. xii. 10. Then, in that day, Zech. xiii. 1, 2, 4, and xiv. 8, what inundations of mercy shall refresh the church, when the Lord will extend her peace like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream! great things to the church, and gracious things to the soul. Holy sighs in prayer give intelligence of great mercies to follow. To withstand powerfully all the wiles of Satan, one means is, to consecrate every part of the spiritual armor by prayer in the Spirit. Eph. vi. 18.

8. Apply special promises to special cases in prayer. For God hath and will magnify his word of promise above all his name; when we are under the word of command for a duty, we must seek for a word of promise, and unite them in prayer. John xii. 28. When a promise of aid suits the precept, it renders prayer victorious, and obedience pleasant: when we come with God's own

words into his presence, when we take his words with us that he would "take away all iniquity," he will "receive us graciously." Hosea xiv. 2. Jacob urges that God had bid him return from his country and kindred. Gen. xxxii. 9. Solomon urges the word of promise to David. 1 Kings viii. 24. Jehoshaphat urges the word of promise to Solomon. 2 Chron. xx. 8, 9. Daniel fills his mouth with the promise given to Jeremiah; he reads, and then applies it in prayer. Dan. ix. 2, 3. First search the Bible and look for a promise, and when found, open it before the Lord. Paul teaches us to take the promise given to Joshua, and then to say boldly the Lord is our helper. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. The special ground of the answer of prayer lies in the performance of a promise. Ps. l. 15, and lxv. 24. Simeon lived upon a promise, and expired sweetly in the arms of a promise, in the breathings of a prayer. Luke ii. 29. Sometimes the soul depends for an answer by virtue of the covenant in general; as of that "I will be thy God." Gen. xvii. 7. Sometimes by the great Remembrancer draws water out of some well of salvation; John xiv. 26; but in both, God's faithfulness

is the soul's surety. Hence it is that David in prayer does so often argue upon the veracity and truth of God; and the church in Micah is so confident that the mercy promised to Abraham and confirmed in truth to Jacob, should be plentifully performed to his people Israel. Micah vii. 20.

9. Sober and serious resolutions before God in prayer. The cxix. Psalm is full of these. "I will keep thy statutes. I will run the way of thy testimonies. I will speak of thy testimonies before kings. I have sworn and will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." And elsewhere: "quicken us and we will call upon thy name." Ps. lxxx. 18. "O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Ps. ci. 2. Thus the soul makes holy stipulations and compacts of obedience to God. Thus Jacob, "if God will be with me, then shall the Lord be my God," and resolves upon a house for God, and reserving the tenth of all his estate to his service and worship. Gen. xxviii. 22. And this conjunction "*if*" is not to be taken for a single condition, as if God did not bestow what he asked, God should not be his God; that

were a great wickedness; but it is a rational setting forth of order and time. *Because*, or *since*, God is graciously pleased to promise, I will acknowledge him to be the God whom I adore, by erecting a temple and paying tithes to maintain his worship. But whatever it is that the soul in distress does offer to God in promise, be not slack to perform, for many times answers of prayer may delay till we have performed our promises. Ps. xcvi. 13, 19. David professes to pay what his lips had uttered in trouble, for God had heard him. If we break our words to God, no wonder if we feel what the Lord threatened to Israel, that they should know his breach of promise. Numb. xiv. 34.

10. A waiting frame of spirit in prayer. "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry." Ps. xl. 1. The Hebrew word signifies, "I expected with expectation."—He walked up and down in the gallery of prayer. This is set forth by hope till God hear: "In thee, O Lord, do I hope; thou wilt hear, O Lord my God." Ps. xxxviii. 15. Say with Micah: "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation." Micah vii. 7. Hoping,

expecting, trusting, living upon the promise and looking for an answer of peace, as when an archer shoots an arrow he looks after it with his glass to see how it hits the mark; so says the soul, I will attend and watch how my prayer flies toward the bosom of God, and what messages return from heaven. As the seaman when he has set sail goes to the helm and compass, and stands and observes the sun, or the pole-star, and how the ship works, and how the land-marks form themselves aright according to his chart; so do you, when you have been at prayer, mark your ship, how it makes the port, and what rich goods are laden back again from heaven. Most men lose their prayers in the mists and fogs of non-observation or forgetfulness. And thus we arrive at the second question.

II. How to discover and discern answers to secret prayer, that the soul may be satisfied that it hath prevailed with God?

Let us now consider the condition to prayer in the text. He will return it into your bosoms; this is so when the mercy sought for is speedily and particularly cast into your arms. Ps. civ. 28; cxlvii. 9. Like the irrational creatures in their natural cries seek

their meat from God, and gather what he gives them, and are filled with God. When God openly returns to his children, there is no farther dispute; for the worst of men will acknowledge the divine bounty when he fills their hearts with food and gladness. Acts xiv. 17. But when cases are dubious,

1. Observe the frame and temper of thy spirit in prayer; how the heart works and steers its course in several particulars.

1. A holy liberty of spirit is commonly an excellent sign of answers, a copious spirit of fluentness to pour out requests as out of a fountain. 2 Cor. i. 17. As God shuts up opportunities, so he shuts up hearts when he is not inclined to hear. The heart is sometimes locked up that it cannot pray, or if it does, and will press on, it finds a straitness, as if the Lord had spoken as once to Moses, "Speak no more to me of this matter." Deut. iii. 26. Or as God spake to Ezekiel, Ez. xiv. 14, vii. 2, and vii. 11; though Noah, Daniel and Job should intreat for a nation, when the time of alarm is come, there is no salvation but for their souls. When God intends to take away near relations, or any of his saints unto himself, it often hap-

pens that the church of God nor dear friends have apt reasons or hearts to enlarge. The bow of prayer does not abide in strength. God took away gracious Josiah suddenly. 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. The church had time to write a book of lamentation, and to make it an ordinance in Israel, but no time for deprecation of the divine displeasure in it; but in Hezekiah's case, there was both a reason and a heart enlarged in prayer, and the prophet crying for a sign of the mercy. 2 Kings xx. 11. Holy James might be quickly despatched by the word of Herod Agrippa, but the church had time for supplication in behalf of Peter. Acts xii. 2, 12. When the Lord is graciously pleased to grant space of time and enlargement of heart, 't is a notable sign of success. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress," says David, Psalm iv. 1, though it be meant of deliverance, yet it may be applied to prayer, as the holy prophet seems to do; yea, though the soul may be under some sense of displeasure and in extremities, yet lifts up a cry. Psalm xviii. 6. When conscience stops the mouths of hypocrites, they shun and fly the presence of God.

2. A blessed serenity and quiet calmness of spirit in time of prayer, especially when the soul comes troubled and clouded at first while it pours out its complaints before the Lord; but at length the sun shines forth brightly. It is said of Hannah, she was no more sad, her countenance was no longer in the old hue, cast down and sorrowful, because of her rival. Thus the Lord dealt with David, though not fully answered, yet filled with holy fortitude of spirit, and revived in the midst of his trouble. 1 Sam. i. 18. Prayer dispels anxious solicitude, and chases away black thoughts from the heart. Psalm cxxxviii. 3, 7. It eases conscience, and fills the soul with the peace of God. Phil. iv. 6, 7.

3. A joyful frame of spirit. God sometimes makes his people not only peaceful, but joyful in his house of prayer. Thus sped Hezekiah, Isaiah lvi. 7, when his crane-like chatterings were turned into swan-like songs, and his mournful elegies into glorious praises upon ten-stringed instruments in the house of the Lord; the lips of Habbakuk quivered and his belly trembled, but before he finished, his voice was voluble in holy songs and his

fingers nimble upon the harp. Hab. iii. 16. Thus at Solomon's prayer; when the fire came down, the people were warmed at worship, and went away glad and merry at heart. 2 Chron. vii. 1, 10. David's experience of this sent him often to the house of God for comfort, and thus chides his soul when cast down at any time; "I am going to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; why art thou disquieted within me?" Psalm xliii. 4, 5. His old harp, that had cured Saul of his malignant dumps, being played upon with temple songs, now cures his own spiritual sadness. When we look upon God with an eye of faith in prayer it enlightens our faces with heavenly joy; when Moses came out of the mount from communion with God, how illustrious was his face from that heavenly vision; wherefore prayer for divine mercy and comfort sometimes exhibits itself in this language: "Make thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved," Psalm lxxxiii. 3; and on this wise the priests of old were to bless the children of Israel: "The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee." Numbers vi. 25. These, and the like expressions in Scripture,

import that sometimes the Lord was pleased to give forth a shining glory from the oracle, and thereby made known his presence unto his people, and filled them with awful impressions of his majesty and mercy. Ex. xl. 34. Lev. ix. 23. Numb. xvi. 19. This joyful light of God's countenance is like the sun rising upon the face of the earth. It chases away the dark fears and discouragements of the night; such heavenly joy shows the strength of faith in prayer, and the radiant appearances of God; yea, to this end all prayer should be directed, that our joy may be full. John xvi. 24.

4. A sweetness of affection to God; when the soul has gracious sentiments of God in prayer, clouds of jealousy, and suspicions of the divine mercy, as if God were a hard master, are marvellously unbecoming a soul that should go to God as a father; and hence, from such unsuitable thoughts of infinite mercy, to restrain prayer is greatly provoking. Whereas the apprehension of God's excellent goodness should work the heart into lovely thoughts of God. Man, but especially a saint, is an accumulated heap of divine favors, and the gifts of divine mercy should

attract our hearts, and when the soul comes to perceive that all flows from the fountain of his eternal love, it makes prayer to be filled with holy delight and joy; the ecstacies of love often rise upon the soul in secret, and such divine affection, that it carries the soul beyond itself. Let the profane world say what they will, when spiritual ardors, like so many fragrant spices, flow out of the soul. "I love the Lord, for he hath heard my supplication." Psalms cxvi. 1. As answers of prayer flow from the love of the father, so suitable workings of holy affections flow from the hearts of children. John xvi. 27. When the soul is filled with gracious intimations, like those of the angelical voice to Daniel, "O Daniel, greatly beloved," or like that to the Holy Virgin, "Hail, thou that art highly favored," how greatly does it inflame the heart to God. Dan. x. 11. Luke i. 28.

5. Inward encouragements sometimes spring in upon the heart in prayer, from remembrance of former experiments, which mightily animate the soul with fervency. When Moses calls to mind that God had forgiven and delivered from Egypt until that

immediately follows a sweet intimation of mercy. Numb. xiv. 19, 20. When the soul considers the days of old, the years of ancient times, and calls to remembrance its former songs in the night, he draws an argument out of the quiver of experience, "will God be favorable no more? can he forget to be gracious? can he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Psalm lxxvii. 5, 6, 7, 9, 10.

6. A ready heart for thankfulness and service. The heart is brimful and ready to flow over in grateful memorials of his mercy. "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" Psalm cxvi. 12. As of old at temple sacrifices there was music, so it ought to be now while the mercy is praying for, the heart must be winding up, and tuning for praise. Rev. v. 8. Psalm cvii. 1. The vials full of the odors of prayer are joined with harps for heavenly melody, when the heart is fixed or prepared, then follow songs and praise. This streams from a sense of divine love; and love is the fountain of thankfulness, and of all sprightly and vigorous services; that prayer that does not end in cheerful obedience is called by Cyprian,

"barren and unfruitful, naked and without ornament." And so we may glance upon the expression of James, v. 16, "the effectual, fervent prayer," a working prayer within will be working without, and demonstrate the labor of love.

II. Observe the principal subject matter of prayer; the while mark that the arrow of prayer is shot at the scope it aims at, there is usually some special sin unconquered, some untamed corruption, some defect, some pressing strait that drives the soul to prayer, and is the main burden of the spirit; take notice how such a sin withers, or such a grace flourishes, or such a need supplied upon the opening our hearts in prayer. Watch unto prayer, watch to perform it, 1 Peter iv. 7, and then to expound the voice of the divine oracle, and to know that you are successful. Cry to thy soul, by way of holy soliloquy, "Watchman, what of the night?" Is. xxi. 11.

III. Observe ensuing providences. Set a vigilant eye upon succeeding circumstances, examine them as they pass before thee, set a wakeful sentinel at the ports of wisdom. "His name is near, his wondrous works declare." Psalm lxxv. 1. His name of truth,

his glorious title of hearing prayer. When prayer is gone up by the help of the Spirit, mark how "all things work together for good." Rom. viii. 28. And note the connexion there; the *working of things together*, follows the intercession of the Spirit for all saints. Rom. viii. 27. God is pleased often to speak so clearly by his works, as if he said, "Here I am, I will guide thee continually, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not." Is. lviii. 9, 11. Secret promises animate prayer, and often providently expound it. Cyrus was promised to come against Babylon for the church's sake. Is. xlv. 4, 11, 19. But Israel must ask it of God, and they had a word for it that they should not ask his face in vain; and then follows Babylon's fall in the succeeding chapter. When we cry to the Lord in trouble, he sends his word of command, and heals us. Psalm cvii. 19, 20. There is a set time of mercy, a time of life; when Abraham had prayed for a son, the Lord told him "at the time appointed I will return." Gen. xv. 2; xviii. 14. In a great extremity, after the solemn fast of three days by the Jews in Shusan, and the queen in her pal-

ace on the fourth day, at night the king could not sleep, and must hear the chronicles of Persia read, and then follows Haman's ruin. Est. iv. 16, and vi. 1. Prayer has a strange virtue to give quiet sleep, sometimes to a David, and sometimes a waking pillow for the good of the church. Psalm iii. 4, 5. Gen. xxiv. 15. When Jacob had done wrestling, and the angel gone at the springing of the morning, then the good man saw the angel of God's presence in the face of Esau. Sometimes Providence is not so quick; the martyr's prayer, as to a complete answer, is deferred for a season, Rev. vi. 11, but long white robes are given to every one, a triumphant frame of spirit, and told they should wait but a little season till divine justice should work out the issue of prayer; the thunder upon God's enemies comes out of the temple; the judgments roar out of Zion, the place of divine audience. Rev. xi. 19. Joel iii. 16. But the means, and methods, and times of God's working are various, such as we little prethink. Submit all to his infinite wisdom; prescribe not, but observe the embroidery of Providence; it is difficult to spell its characters sometimes, but 't is a rare

employment. Is. lxiv. 5. Psalm cxi. 2. Eccl. iii. 11. His works are searched into by such as delight in his providences, for all things are beautiful in his season.

IV. Observe thy following communion with God. Inward answers make the soul vegetate and lively, like plants after the shining of the sun upon rain, 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, lift up their heads and shoot forth their flowers. A saint in favor does all with delight. Answer of prayer is like oil to the spirits, and beauty for ashes; the sackcloth of mournful fasting is turned to a wedding garment. He grows more free and yet humbly familiar with heaven. This is one I would wish you to pick acquaintance with, that can come and have what he will at court. John xvi. 23. As the Lord once told a king by night, that Abraham was a prophet, and would pray for him, he was acquainted with the King of heaven. Gen. xx. 7. O blessed person! I hope there 's many such among you, whose life is a perpetual prayer, as David that gave himself to prayer. Psalm cix. 4. (The Hebrew expression, "but I prayer," is very forcible;) he is all over prayer, prays at rising, and prays at lying down, prays as he walks,

he is always ready for prayer; like a prime favorite at court that has the golden key to the privy stairs, and can wake his prince by night, there are such, (whatever the besotted profane world dreams,) who are ready for spiritual ascents at all seasons, besides the frequency of set communions. His wings never weary, his willing spirit is flying continually, and makes God the rock of his dwelling, into which he may, upon all assaults, have holy retirements.

But enough, for the main question with its branches. There are many particular queries of some weight that may attend the subject. To such I shall briefly reply.

Query 1. What is the proper time for secret prayer?

Various providences, different temperaments and frames of spirit, motions from heaven, opportunities, dictate variously. Some find it best at evening, others in the night, when all is silent, others at morning, when the spirits are freshest. I think with respect to others, that conscientious prudence must guide in such cases, but it should be when others are retired, and the spirit in the best frame for communion.

Query 2. How often should we pray in secret?

If we consult Scripture precedent, we find David at prayer in the morning. Psalm v. 3. Our blessed Lord, early, before day, in the morning. Mark i. 35. Chrysostom advises, "wash thy soul before thy body, for as the face and hands are cleansed by water, so is the soul by prayer." At another time our Lord went to secret prayer in the evening, Matt. xiv. 23, and Isaac went out at eventide to meditate. Gen. xxiv. 63. David and Daniel prayed three times a day, Psalm lv. 17; Dan. vi. 10; and once it is mentioned that David said, seven times a day will I praise thee; that is, "*often* will I do it." Psalm cxix. 164. Such cases may happen that may require frequent accesses to the throne of grace in a day. But I humbly think we should go there at least once a day, which seems to be imported by that passage in our Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," for after our Lord's appointment of secret prayer in the text, he gives this prayer as a pattern to his disciples.

Query 3. When persons are under temp-

tations or disturbance by passions, is it expedient then to pray?

Since we are enjoined to "lift up holy hands without wrath," 1 Tim. ii. 8, I judge it is not so proper to run immediately to prayer, but with some praying ejaculations for pardon and strength against such exorbitancy, and when in some measure cooled and composed, then speed to prayer, and take heed that the sun go not down upon your wrath, without holy purgation by prayer. Ep. iv. 26. Though I must confess that a Christian should always endeavor to keep his course and heart in such a frame as not to be unfit for prayer upon small warnings. The very consideration of our frequent communion with God should be a great bar to immoderate and exuberant passions.

Query 4. Whether we may pray in secret when others must needs take notice of our retirement?

I must confess, in a strait house, and when a person can many times find no seasons but such as will fall under observation, I think he ought not to neglect secret duty for fear of the notice of others; we must

prevent it as much as may be, and especially watch our hearts against spiritual pride, and God may graciously turn it to a testimonv and example to others.

Query 5. Whether we may be vocal in secret prayer, if we can't so well raise or keep up affection, or preserve the heart from wandering without it?

No doubt; but yet there must be used a great deal of wise caution about extending the voice. Tertullian advises that both hands and countenance and voice should be ordered with great reverence and humility; and what else do we by *discovering* our prayers than if we prayed in public? Yet if we can obtain some very private place, or when others are away from home, such may lawfully improve it to their private benefit.

Query 6. How to keep the heart from wandering thoughts in prayer?

Although it be exceedingly difficult to attain so excellent a frame, yet by frequent remembering and reflecting upon the eye of God in secret; by endeavoring to fix the heart with all possible watchfulness upon the main scope of the prayer in hand; by being very sensible of our wants and indi-

gences, by not studying an impertinent length, but rather being more frequent and short, considering God is in heaven and we upon the earth, and by the exercise of holy communion, we may, through the implored assistance of the Spirit, attain some sweetness and freedom, and also more fixedness of spirit in our addresses before the Lord.

Query 7. What if present answers seem not to correspond to our petitions?

We must not conclude it by and by to be a token of displeasure, and say with Job, "wherefore dost thou contend with me?" Job x. 2; but acknowledge the sovereignty of divine wisdom and love in things which seem contrary to us in petitions for temporal mercies, and submit to the counsel of Elihu, since he giveth no account of any of his matters. Job xxxiii. 13. Neither can we find out the unsearchable methods of his holy ways to any perfection.

There are other cases and scruples that might be treated of; as about prescribed forms of prayer in secret prayer, to which I need say but little, since such as are truly converted, Gal. iv. 6, have the promise of the Spirit of God to assist and enable them,

and they need not drink of another man's bucket that have the fountain, nor use stilts and crutches that have spiritual strength; neither are words and phrases, but faith and holy groans, the nerves of prayer. Rom. viii. 26. Zech. xii. 10. Acts ix. 11. Yet, for some help to young beginners, it is of use to observe the style of the spirit, as well as the heavenly matter of several prayers in the Holy Scriptures.

Neither need I press frequency to a holy heart that is fallen in love with spiritual communion, for he delights to be continually with God; the thoughts of God are so precious to him his soul is even sick of affection, and prays to be stayed with more of "the flagons," and comforted with "the apples" in greater abundance. Cant. ii. 5. To some, but I fear very few, it may be needful to say how far it may be expedient to withdraw from prayer for the necessity of the frail body in this vale of tears. It may be said to such, the Lord is very pitiful and gracious to our frailties, that he had rather have mercy than sacrifice in some cases. Though I doubt these phenixes are very rare that are in dan-

ger of expiring in prayer as martyrs of holy love, as Gerson expresses it.

Having now finished with what brevity I could the foregoing queries, I should treat of short, sudden, occasional prayers, commonly called ejaculations; but indeed that requires a set discourse, yet because of a promise before recited, I shall give a few hints, and then conclude with some application.

EJACULATORY PRAYER.

EJACULATORY PRAYER is a sudden, short breathing of the soul toward heaven upon instant and surprising emergency. In holy persons it is quick and lively, rising from a vehement ardor of spirit, swifter than the flight of eagles, and keeps pace with a flash of lightning. It flies upon the wings of a holy thought into the third heavens in the twinkling of an eye, and fetches auxiliary forces in time of need.

There are many precedents recorded in sacred page upon great and notable occasions with strange success. When good magistrates are busy in the work of reformation, let them imitate Nehemiah when redressing the profanation of the Sabbath: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this thing." Neh. xiii. 14, 22. When captains and generals go forth to war, observe Israel's appeal to God rather than acclamations to

men: "The Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses." Josh. i. 17. In times of battle, or pursuit of the enemy, valiant Joshua darts up such a prayer as this: "O that the Lord would lengthen this triumphant day." Josh. x. 12. And the Lord heard his voice. The tribes beyond Jordan in a battle with the Hagarites, 1 Chron. v. 10, 20. When Jehoshaphat was in a sore strait, 2 Chron. xviii. 31. Samson ready to perish at Lehi with thirst, and when blind exposed to contempt in the temple of Dagon, Judges xv. 18. xvi. 28. Elisha at Dothan encompassed with a Syrian host, "Lord, open this young man's eyes." 2 Kings vi. 17. David near being stoned at Ziklag, 1 Sam. xxx. 6, and when flying from Absalom in the ascent of Mount Olivet. 2 Sam. xv. 31. In the midst of lawful and laborious callings, Boaz to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." Ruth ii. 4. It sanctifies the plough, as Jerome said of the fields of Bethlehem. "The tillers of the fields and the dressers of the vineyards, sang David's psalms." It keeps the shop, and inclines the hearts of customers, it bars the doors, it quenches fires, it blesseth thy children within thee, it preserves thy going out

and coming in. Jacob found it to rest upon his children going a journey to Egypt. Gen. xliii. 14. It closes the eye with sweet sleep, Psalm iii. 5, gives songs in the night, and wakens the soul in the arms of mercy. Job xxxv. 10. Psalm cxxxix. 18. It sits at the helm when the storm rises at sea, gives strength to anchors in roads, and prosperous gales to the venturous merchant. Psalm cvii. 28. Jonas i. 6. When in the palace at dinner, Nehemiah presents the cup to his prince, he presents also a Michtam, a golden prayer to the King of Heaven. Neh. ii. 4. At the reading of the law, Josiah was heard as to some secret cries to Heaven. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. At a holy conference in a journey, the disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." Luke xvii. 5. Jacob, on his dying pillow, predicting future events to his children, falls into a holy rapture: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Gen. xlix. 18. At sacred death in martyrdom Zechariah cries out, "the Lord look upon it and require it." 2 Chron. ii. 4. And Stephen under a shower of stones melts into prayer for the stony hearts that flung them. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Acts vii. 60. And

our blessed Saviour in his greatest agonies makes a tender-hearted prayer: "Father, forgive them," &c. Luke xxiii. 34. And lastly, in the distresses of others, Eli puts up a sudden prayer for Hannah: "The God of Israel grant thy petition." 1 Sam. i. 17.

In these and many like cases, the Holy Word stores us with patterns for ejaculation in all extremities, which I cannot now digest and improve; only in a few words let us take a view of the usefulness of such a sudden flight of the soul to heaven.

1. It helps us to a speedy preparation for all duties; with such an ejaculation let us lift up our hands to God in the heavens. Lam. iii. 41.

2. It is a guard against secret sins in the first rising, and the first assaults of temptation.

3. It suffers not divine mercies to slip by unobserved in a wakeful Christian, and proves a fruitful mother of gratitude and praise.

4. It sanctifies all our worldly employments, it fastens the stakes in the hedge of divine protection, and turns every thing to a blessing. 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

5. It is a saint's buckler against sudden ac-

cidents, a present antidote against frights and evil tidings. It is good at all occasions, and consecrates to us not only our meals, but every gasp of air, &c.

6. It is a sweet companion that the severest enemies cannot abridge us of. Outward ordinances and closet duties they may cut off; the little nail in the holy place they may pluck out. Ezra ix. 8. But no labyrinth, no prison, not the worst of company can hinder this; in the very face of adversaries we may lift our souls to God.

Let us conclude with some uses:

Use 1. To convince such of their dangerous state that neglect secret duties, that have no heart communion, that draw no water out of the sealed fountain. But all they do is in public only. It is a suspicious token of hypocrisy this, since the kernel and soul of religion lies so much in the heart and closet. Mark the phrase in the text. God's eye is open upon thee in the closet, and if thy eye be open upon his, thou mayst see a glorious beauty. The excellence of grace lies in making conscience of secret sins and secret duties.

Use 2. To examine such as perform secret

duty, but not from a sincere principle, like Amaziah; that prays, but not with a perfect heart. 2 Chron. xxv. 2. Like Ahab, they mourn with but crocodile tears; such as do it only because they find precept or example for it, and therefore to quiet conscience, they converse only in the shell and trunk of a duty, they rest in the naked performance; but matter not whether they taste of the sweet streams that flow in from heaven in the golden pipe of an ordinance. What account can such render that go into their closet, but like Domitian, to catch flies only, and when the doors are shut to the world, their hearts are shut to heaven and communion with God? He that sees in secret beholds the evil frame of such a heart, and will one day openly punish it.

Use 3. To excite and awaken all to this excellent duty, and to manage it in an excellent manner. Would ye live delightfully, would you translate heaven to earth, then keep up communion in secret prayer, to know *him*, to discern *his* face, to behold the lustre of *his* eye that shines in secret. Remember the glorious person that meets in your closet; all the world yields no such glittering beauty

as a gracious person sees when he is in a happy frame at secret prayer. Shut your eyes when you come out, for all other objects are but vile and sordid, and not worth the glances of a noble soul. O the sweetness of the hidden manna that the soul tastes when in lively communion with God! It is a part of that which is laid up for saints in glory; let us a little relish our souls with it.

1. Consider what affectionate agonies the soul delights to conflict with in secret; fears that raise confidence, humility that exalts, tremblings that embolden, bright clouds that shine upon Israelites in the night, and darkness that enlightens, solitudes full of heavenly company, and tears brimful of joy, and holy sighs, like a cooling wind in harvest, sick fits that are symptoms of health, and holy faintings that are the soul's cordials, a weariness to the flesh that is the healthful exercise of it, and vigor to the spirit, and a continual motion that never tires. As Austin said of divine love: "It is the weight of my soul, it carries me up and down in all that I speak and act."

2. Its ecstacies and heavenly raptures, which allure and draw the heart from earthly

vanities, and the soul shuts its eyes to worldly delights, and says of laughter, with Solomon, it is mad, and of mirth, what doest thou? Can't warm its thoughts at the crackling of thorns under a pot, nor be joyful in the house of a fool. Ecc. ii. 2; vii. 64. 'T is the soul's pleasure to loath pleasure itself; none so beautiful to him as Christ, the chiefest of ten thousand; no sweetness like that of the tree in the midst of the wood, the tree of life, in the midst of the paradise of God: he sits under it with great delight, while it drops sweeter than honey into his closet. Rev. ii. 7. 1 Sam. xiv. 26.

3. Its admirable prophecies: prayer stands upon Mount Zion with a divining, presaging spirit. It foretells great things, to the church's joy and its enemies' terror. Elijah at prayer in Horeb receives answer of the ruin of the house of Ahab, and bid to go and anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi king over Israel. 2 Kings ix. 2. The two witnesses under the Roman defection have power to smite the earth with plagues as often as they will, Rev. xi., consonant to what Tertullian said of old, "The prayers of Christians confounded the nations," and so it will shortly

prove, the doom of Babylon comes out of the temple. When the sanctuary is full of the smoke of the incense of prayer, the seven angels come out with the seven last vials full of the wrath of God to pour them out upon the anti-Christian world. Rev. xv. 7, 8; xvi. 1. Prayer calculates and hastens the ruin of Rome. When the spirit of prayer is once poured out, it brings deliverance to Mount Zion, and gathers the nations into the valley of Jehoshaphat unto judgment. Joel ii. 28, 32, and iii. 1, 2. Let us never be discouraged; if prayer fall to work and awaken Christ in the ship of the church, her storms will cease in a halcyon calm. Luke viii. 24.

4. Its comforting evidences: secret prayer duly managed is a notable evidence of adoption; pray to thy Father who is, and sees in secret, who knows the secrets of thy heart; thy groanings are not hid from him; none but a child of promise has this sweet freedom with God as a Father.

5. Its rewards and reverences: nothing revives and cheers the spirit so much as answers of love and mercy from heaven. As it feasts the conscience with the royal dain-

ties of sincerity, so it sets a lustre upon every mercy as being the child of prayer; our closets exert an influence upon our shops, our ships, our fields, and all that we enjoy, so that they smell of the divine blessing. As David said of the precepts, the soul may say, "This I have because I urged the promises." Psalm cxix. 56.

Use 4. To pity the miserable blind world that know not where true comfort, joy and strength are to be found, that see no beauty in the ways of God, and feel no sweetness in communion with him, that find no pleasure in closets, but all in play-houses, which Tertullian called the devil's churches, that cry out with Esau that they have *enough*. Gen. xxxiii. 9. Alas! what enough can be in the creature unless of noise, rattle and vanity! O how ignorant of heavenly treasures, of that fountain of mercies whereof prayer drinks and refreshes the spirit of a saint; who know not that blessed *enough* whereof Jacob speaks, that ocean of all things to be found in God! Gen. xxxiii. 11. Now let Europe be in flames, and the very ark in danger, a prayerless man cares not, though the one be burnt and the other in

ashes, so he be safe, and if his concerns catch fire he can only repair to Endor or Ekron. 1 Sam. xxviii. 7; 2 Kings i. 2. Such have no acquaintance, no hope from God, no interest in the keeper of souls. The world is a deplorable hospital, the great Lazar house of sick, lame and impotent persons, as Gerson terms it, who have no face nor heart to go to the physician of souls.

But ah! most lamentable is the state of some profligate wretches of our age, that are, I fear, almost incurably gone with spiritual ulcers in their lungs, and putrid cancers in their tongues, that breathe nothing but venom, and openly spit out their rotten atheistical jeers against the spirit of prayer, and make a mock at communion with God, that scoff at what God has promised us as one of the choicest tokens of his love to the church, and symptoms of the glory of the latter times, Zech. xii. 10. Joel ii. 28, 32. Rom. x. 13, when God will turn such Ishmaels into the desert, and their drunken songs shall expire in dreadful howlings. Profaner than many heathen, that in the primitive times had some reverence for Christian worship, though they persecuted. Amos viii. 10.

Job xxx. 31. But those of this adulterous Roman age, like brute beasts, speak evil of what they are ignorant, and are in danger to perish in their corruption. 2 Peter ii. 12. Pity such if there be yet hope, and commend their condition to God's mercy, and to penitent sorrow, that they may weep here where tears smart, not in hell where they scald and burn and swell that river of brimstone.

In the mean time, O ye that fear the Lord, be diligent to observe and interpret messages after secret prayer, for the life and joy of a Christian is improved by it. God has declared himself graciously pleased with secret prayer, so as to send an angel, that glorious creature, to fly into Daniel's chamber, and he weary with flying, he moved so swiftly, as the original text expresses it. Dan. ix. 21. What a high expression is this, that even angels are represented weary with hasty flights to bring saints their answers! and of what great account does the Lord esteem his praying people, that angels are expressed to be tired in bringing tidings of mercy!

6. Meditate on the glory of heaven, where all our prayers shall be turned into praises, when every sigh below shall be an accent

to the heavenly music above, and the tears of the valley shall be turned into orient gems in the diadem of glory. Here we live in wants and desires, but there shall be palms in the hand, white robes and everlasting joy are upon the heads and hearts of saints.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08998 334 8